AN EIGHT DAYS' RETREAT

HURTER

A. M. D. G.

SKETCHES
FOR THE EXERCISES OF AN
EIGHT DAYS' RETREAT

BY

HUGO HURTER, S J., PH.D., D.D.

Professor Emeritus of Theology in the Catholic University of Innsbruck

TRANSLATED BY

JOHN B. KOKENGE, S.J.

ALMA COLLEGE
060.32
LIBRARY
H948
Alma, California

"Make my heart like unto Thine"

THIRD EDITION

B. HERDER BOOK CO.

17 SOUTH BROADWAY, ST. LOUIS, MO.

AND

33 QUEEN SQ., LONDON, W. C.

1926

6464

IMPRIMI POTEST

A. J. Burrowes, S.J.,
Praep. Provincialis
Prov. Missour.

NIHIL OBSTAT

Sti. Ludovici, die 27 Aprilis, 1918
F. G. Holweck,
Censor Librorum.

IMPRIMATUR

Sti. Ludovici, die 28 Aprilis, 1918
✠*Joannes J. Glennon,*
Archiepiscopus
Sti. Ludovici.

Copyright, 1918
by
Joseph Gummersbach

All rights reserved
Printed in U. S. A.

BECKTOLD
PRINTING AND BOOK MFG CO.
ST. LOUIS, MO

PREFACE

As a help for those who wish to avail themselves of this plan of eight days' spiritual exercises, we beg leave to make a few preliminary remarks.

1. It is self-evident that this plan presupposes the little book or text of the SPIRITUAL EXERCISES of St. Ignatius; because our object is only to develop somewhat further the meditations in that book, and thus to call attention to the abundance of thought therein contained. Thus these meditations may become all the more helpful for the salvation of souls. Hence we take for granted the many practical hints laid down in the numerous annotations and additions which the Saint applies on suitable occasions. These pages are not intended as a commentary on the Book of Exercises, but rather as a development of the points of meditation.

2. The meditations are especially composed for priests, theologians, and members of religious communities; however, lay persons also, both men and women, will find in them much which they can with profit apply to themselves.

3. The meditations will not be equally useful or sufficient for all alike, because the circumstances and needs of individuals are so very different. It will be easy to select a suitable number of meditations

and considerations for three, five, and also eight days.

4. The plans or points of the meditations may seem to be too long for many. But considering the abundance of thought contained in the meditations recommended by St. Ignatius, we found it scarcely possible to make them shorter, unless we entirely passed over important doctrines unfamiliar to persons not well skilled in the art of meditating. However, these meditations, so rich in content, may well be divided into several, and thus during the year a person, even if he be not in retreat, may use them with great profit to himself.

May these sketches, made fruitful by the grace of God, become a great help to those who will make use of them for the salvation of their souls.

Innsbruck, Friday, August 5, 1910.

INTRODUCTION

St. Luke relates an event which seems to be very suitable for an introduction to the SPIRITUAL EXERCISE. He tells us (19, 1–10) how Zacheus, the chief of the publicans, prompted by a desire to "see Jesus," ran ahead of the multitude, and as he was small of stature, climbed a tree, from which he could behold Him easily and at leisure. Here he was all eyes, eager to espy Jesus. The Savior, who "searcheth reins and hearts," anticipated beyond all expectation the good will of the publican, directed His steps towards the tree, stopped there, looked up, talked to Zacheus, and invited Himself to be his guest, saying, "Zacheus, make haste and come down, for to-day I must abide in thy house!" Such a manifestation of goodness, condescension, and courtesy surpassed the fondest expectations the publican could have dared to entertain. And he made haste, came down, and received Him with joy. Moved by His goodness, he drew near to Jesus and said to Him: "Behold, Lord, the half of my goods I give to the poor; and if I have wronged any man of anything, I restore it fourfold." But the Lord said to him: "This day is salvation come to this house."

From this narrative we become acquainted with

the *purpose* of the spiritual exercises, with the conditions for attaining it, and with the fruit to be derived therefrom.

I

The *object* of the spiritual exercises is *to see Jesus,* to appear before Him as our *future Judge,* as our *Redeemer* and *Savior,* as our *Lord* and *Master.*

1. *To see Jesus,* to appear before Him as our *future Judge.* Yes, we shall all stand before the judgment seat of Christ. For it is written: "As I live, saith the Lord, every knee shall bow to me, and every tongue shall confess to God." (Is. 45, 24) "Every one of us shall have to render an account of himself to God." (Rom. 14, 10, 12) And this account is decisive for all eternity. On it depends heaven or hell,— never ending bliss, or everlasting woe. It is, therefore, advisable to search our conscience now that we may see whether we shall be able to endure that final test. This self-examination our Divine Lord will these days accept from us. He calls out to us: "Give an account of thy stewardship." (Luke 16, 1) He will ask us what we have done with the many graces He has given us; what use we have made of our precious time, of the months and the years we have lived; about the fulfillment of the duties of our calling, as *men,* as *christians,* as *priests,* as *religious;* of the obligations which each one has in his state and vocation. In a word, He will put to a test all our thoughts, words, actions,

omissions. Happy we if this scrutiny of ourselves turn out satisfactorily. We may thank God. But if it turn out unsatisfactorily to Him, then He reminds us to make amends while yet we have the time to do so; namely, to make good use of these days of grace by putting into good order everything appertaining to our soul's salvation, so that the last examination may turn out in our favor, and we may "see Jesus."

2. Even in spite of the best will and of all good resolutions during the course of the year, many faults have stolen in upon us. Inordinate inclinations and unbridled passions which we have harbored have inflicted many a wound; faith is weak, hope is failing, and charity is growing lukewarm; fervor in prayer has relaxed; the spirit of sacrifice has died out. Our soul is sick. "Lord, behold! he whom thou lovest is sick." (John 2, 3) Yes, this is the time to see Jesus, to have recourse to our Redeemer. We must, therefore, during these days feel our pulse and acquire a thorough knowledge of our entire wretchedness, of all our faults and weaknesses, of all our ill-regulated inclinations and passions; and we must show them to Jesus to get from Him the ways and means to wake up from the stupor of sin and lukewarmness, and then once more with a new fervor to follow the Lord.

3. We are the servants of Jesus Christ, His heralds and messengers, His representatives. Is it not reasonable, then, that from time to time we should

present ourselves before Him to report, to give an account of our official management, of our activity, of our efficiency and instructions? Should we not go to Him to obtain direction for the future, and thus become ever more efficient in our labors for His cause? Should we not have trusting and confidential intercourse with Him, to be refreshed and renewed, to be filled with His light, with His fire, and with His spirit, and thus to bring these His virtues again before the world to enlighten others and make them fervent and enthusiastic for Jesus? Thus did the disciples present themselves before our Lord after their apostolic labors, to report and obtain directions. (Luke 9, 10; 19, 17) We must frequently come back to school to our Lord, that we may penetrate more deeply into His views, His sentiments, and His spirit. If the State every year calls in its able men for military practice so that they may not forget their skill in the use of their weapons, it is self-evident that if our Commander-in-Chief so wishes it, we too should gather around Him to be animated by His spirit, and filled with His courage to fight the good fight again. With Zacheus we shall these days see Jesus, as our *Judge, Savior, Lord* and *Master*.

II

Zacheus teaches us, by his example, with what disposition we should enter upon these spiritual exercises. "On account of the multitude" he could

not see Jesus. So, too, are we disturbed in our confidential intercourse with Jesus by a three-fold crowd: by being wrapped up in a great amount of *business;* by numberless *distractions* arising from it; by our many *faults,* which sadden the intimacy of our communion with Him. What is to be done?

1. Zacheus *withdraws* from the multitude, runs ahead. So too must we divest ourselves of our manifold occupations, distractions and obstacles to our spiritual advancement.

2. Not satisfied with this, he *climbs up* into a tree. So must we too elevate ourselves, and work up to a life which is above the daily routine and the things of earth, above the distractions which lead our attention away from seeing Jesus, from our familiarity with Him. This we do by carefully considering eternal truths and the example of our Lord Jesus Christ; and thus we ascend to obtain a broader, a clearer, a more certain and more thorough view of our past and future life.

3. a. There Zacheus *waits* with an *ardent desire.* In like manner must we with an ardent desire begin the spiritual exercises. They are a great *grace,* and *most important* for the future, not only for ourselves, but for all committed to our care. The better we apply ourselves to them, the more abundant and blessed will be our influence upon others. We may well compare the Spiritual Exercises with the seven years of plenty which Joseph prophesied to Pharao (Gen. 41). Upon the supplies stored dur-

ing these years the Egyptians were to live during the years of scarcity which followed. So, too, must we live on the provisions gathered in our retreat during the time of scarcity which is sure to follow.

b. Zacheus waited with wrapped attention, for he knew that the Lord "would pass by that way." He knew that the opportunity was but a passing one and of short duration. The shorter the spiritual exercises are in duration, the more earnestly must we apply all our faculties to reap a rich harvest from the opportunity given us. "Behold now is the acceptable time, now is the day of salvation." (2 Cor. 6, 2) "To-day if you shall hear his voice harden not your hearts." (Psalm 94, 8)

c. From his tree Zacheus looks with searching eye upon Jesus. So too must we, elevated by meditation, scrutinize ourselves with unsparing penetration. We must search the years and days we have lived, and examine how we have spent them; search the duties of our calling; how we have complied with them; search the world of our thoughts, what principles swayed us; search our will and heart, what emotions stirred the one and what sentiments guided the other; search our imagination, our five senses, what use we have made of them; search our relation to the world about us, to our superiors, to our subjects, to our neighbors. In a word, we must search all our actions and omissions, our daily work, from early morning to late at night. What an extended view, what an expansive field for work!

How kindly disposed our Divine Savior is where He finds a good will. As He surpasses all the expectations of Zacheus, so during these days, if there is but a little good will, He will show Himself in His entire condescension and will not be niggardly with His graces. Harken then to what He asks of us.

1. *Zeal,* activity. "Zacheus, make haste and come down." We have every reason to be fervent during this time of grace.

2. "Come down." Penetrate the meditations, be not content with only hearing them. Simply seeing eatables does not satiate; they must be eaten, masticated, digested, and enter into our flesh and blood, for then only will they become beneficial to the system. So, too, hearing the meditation does not make us holy. We must absorb the points, be impressed and penetrated by them. They must take deep root. Then, and then only, will they be productive and bear fruit. "Blessed are they that hear the word of God, and keep it." (Luke 11, 28)

3. "I must abide in thy house." We must not be content with a fleeting fervor; we must strive after solid and lasting fruit.

4. Zacheus heeds the request of Christ: "He made haste, and came down and received Him with joy."

III

Now then what *fruit* did "seeing Jesus," the entering of the Lord into Zacheus' house, bear? A wonderful change, a conversion!

1. "Salvation is come to this house." Salvation! because the wounds of the soul are now healed; all the sins of the past are now forgiven. Salvation! because his life, which had been wayward, is now brought back into the right path and is well regulated. Salvation! because he is now permeated by holy sentiments. Salvation! because this new life from now on will have a telling influence for good upon others.

2. "If I have wronged any man of anything, I restore him fourfold." A splendid resolve! Have I failed by neglecting my duty? I restore fourfold! Have I failed by disobedience? I restore fourfold! Have I failed in zeal? I restore fourfold!

3. "Behold, Lord, the half of my goods I give to the poor." Yes, not only the half, but all I possess shall belong to Thee, shall be given to Thy service, shall be expended for the benefit of those whom Thou hast entrusted to my care.

Therefore let us begin these spiritual exercises with the sentiments of Zacheus. Let us follow the invitation of our Lord. May a fourfold blessing reward our efforts, and a redoubled zeal make it manifest that for us they have not been in vain.

Amen.

CONTENTS

PAGE

PREFACE iii

INTRODUCTION v

FIRST DAY

THE SERVICE OF GOD

I. MEDITATION: END OF MAN 1

II. MEDITATION: END OF CREATURES 8

Spiritual Reading, I: Hints for the Spiritual Exercises 18

Consideration, I: Indifference 20

III. MEDITATION-REPETITION: END OF MAN . . . 25

SECOND DAY

SIN, THE GREATEST EVIL

IV. MEDITATION: THE TRIPLE SIN 32

V. MEDITATION: PERSONAL SIN 38

Spiritual Reading, II: Venial Sin 46

Consideration, II: Penance 54

VI. MEDITATION: HELL 64

THIRD DAY

THE RETURN TO GOD

VII. MEDITATION: DEATH 75

VIII. MEDITATION: THE PARABLE OF THE TALENTS . 81

Spiritual Reading, III: Examination of Conscience 87

CONTENTS

PAGE

Conference, III: The Spirit of Penance . . 91

IX. Meditation: The Fall and Repentance of Peter 98

FOURTH DAY

THE FOLLOWING OF CHRIST

X. Meditation: The Kingdom of Christ . . . 107

XI. Meditation-Repetition: The Kingdom of Christ 114

Spiritual Reading, IV: The fourfold fortification 119

Conference, IV: Meditation 126

XII. Meditation: The Incarnation 137

FIFTH DAY

THE SCHOOL OF CHRIST

XIII. Meditation: The Birth of Christ 145

XIV. Meditation: The Flight Into Egypt . . . 151

Spiritual Reading, V: Simeon's Devotion . 156

Conference, V: The Hidden Life of Nazareth 158

XV. Meditation: The Visit to Jerusalem . . . 166

SIXTH DAY

THE STANDARD OF CHRIST

XVI. Meditation: The Two Standards 171

XVII. Meditation: The Choosing of the Apostles 179

Spiritual Reading, VI: The Three Degrees of Humility 186

Conference, VI: The Three Classes of Men 191

XVIII. Meditation: The Agony in the Garden . . 197

CONTENTS

SEVENTH DAY

THE SCHOOL OF THE CROSS

		PAGE
XIX.	MEDITATION: CHRIST BEFORE THE TRIBUNALS	207
XX.	MEDITATION: CHRIST CONDEMNED	211
	Conference, VII: Favorite Virtues of the Sacred Heart	220
XXI.	MEDITATION: CHRIST ON THE CROSS	225

EIGHTH DAY

THE GLORY OF CHRIST

XXII.	MEDITATION: THE RESURRECTION	233
XXIII.	MEDITATION: THE TWO DISCIPLES AT EMMAUS	239
	Spiritual Reading, VII: A Plan of Life	243
	Conference, VIII: True Peace	249
XXIV.	MEDITATION: HEAVEN	258
XXV.	MEDITATION: THE LOVE OF GOD	268

EXERCISES OF AN EIGHT DAYS' RETREAT

FIRST DAY

THE SERVICE OF GOD

"O Lord, I am thy servant; I am thy servant and the servant of thy handmaid." (Ps. 115, 16)

I. MEDITATION. END OF MAN

It is of the greatest importance for us to acquire a clear knowledge why we are here in this world. We are curious to know exactly the purpose of the things we use; but how much more important is it to acquire a clear perception of our destiny, for upon it depends the value of our life. We shall, therefore, now approach the solution of this question.

Go back in thought to paradise and represent to yourself your Creator. With what love and care He forms the first man! "Let us make man to our own image and likeness." (Gen. 1, 26) Let us pray to the Lord for light to obtain a clear knowledge of the purpose He had in creating man.

We shall ask ourselves now: *For what* precisely am I in this world? In the words of the Exercises

we have, in lapidary style, the answer given by reason and more fully by faith: "Man is created to praise God our Lord, to revere and serve Him, and thus to save his soul." We shall divide this answer into three parts, and by so doing, answer three important questions: *Whence am I? Why am I here? Whither am I going? From God; For God; Going back to God.*

I. I Am from God

After an eternity without existence, I was called into being some years ago by the Almighty. I am, then, the work of His hands, a creature of His omnipotence, made out of nothing. This has some very important consequences:

1. I owe to the Almighty *all* that I am and possess: my body and soul, my intellect and will, my five senses, my talents and my powers, my health and my life, during these many years. What gratitude do I not owe to Him? "What shall I return to the Lord for all the things that he hath rendered to me?" (Ps. 115, 12) "Bless the Lord, O my soul, and all that is within me bless his holy name. Bless the Lord, O my soul, and never forget all he has done for thee." (Ps. 102, 1, 2) To grasp the greatness of our duty of gratitude, reflect upon the vastness of every single benefit. Which benefits? Sight, hearing, speech. To appreciate them, think of one born blind, deaf, mute.

2. I am the work of God's omnipotence and owe

Him everything; what follows from this? It follows that I can attribute *nothing* to myself, to my own merits; not the least thing did I give to myself. I must, therefore, be humble and not presumptuous. "What hast thou that thou hast not received? And if thou hast received, why dost thou glory as if thou hadst not received it?" (I Cor. 4, 7)

3. I am a creature of God; what follows from this? It follows that I am the *property* of God, that I belong entirely to Him. He that makes a thing has also a claim to it. As I am the property of God, I must keep myself holy! I must not desecrate the property of God. I must keep myself holy, my will, my heart, my imagination, my eyes, my ears, my tongue. Hence the warning of St. Paul: "Or know you not that your members are the temple of the Holy Ghost, who is in you, whom you have from God, and you are not your own? Glorify and bear God in your body." (I Cor. 6, 19–20)

4. I am a creature of God and His property. Then He can *dispose* of me at pleasure; for a proprietor can dispose of his property. He who has given me eyesight, health, life, and so many other things, can take them away; He can exalt me and lower me. I must be entirely submissive to His holy will, and be disposed as Job was. The Lord had taken away everything He had given to him,— riches, reputation, children, and health; and yet after all these bereavements Job said: "The

Lord gave and the Lord hath taken away, and as it hath pleased the Lord so it was done; blessed be the name of the Lord. . . . If we have received the good things from the hand of God, why should we not receive evil?" (Job 1, 21–2, 10)

5. I am the work of God's hands. What an *honor,* what a joy to be able to glory in having such an originator, such a creator! With what confidence in God's help and assistance ought I not to be filled! The Almighty will not forsake the work of his hands: "For thou lovest all things that are, and hatest none of the things which thou hast made: for thou didst not appoint or make anything, hating it. . . . But thou sparest all, because they are all thine, O Lord, who lovest souls." (Wis. 11, 25, 27) And therefore David full of confidence prayed: "Thy hands have made me and formed me, give me understanding." (Ps. 118, 94) I am from God; hence I must be grateful, look upon myself as His property, be humble and submissive, yet full of courage and joy.

II. I Am for God

For what end did God create me? Every agent acting according to reason has a definite end in view *for his activity.* I must now find out what end God had in view when He created me. He certainly has not destined man for this world to be consumed and lost in it. "We have not here a lasting city." (Heb. 13, 14) "Lay not up for

yourself treasures for earth." (Matt. 6, 19) We were not created for this world; He created everything else in this world for us, but us He created for Himself, to praise Him, to honor Him, and to serve Him. This then is our destiny.

1. To honor God in His infinite majesty, in His house, in His Church, in the representatives whom He has placed over us.

2. To praise God, not only with our tongue, but with our heart also; that His sharp rebuke may not strike us: "This people honoreth me with their lips, but their hearts are far from me." (Matt. 15, 8) We must praise God by our good works, by our good example; for the glory of parents is their virtuous children: "Let your light shine before men, that they may see your good works, and glorify your father who is in heaven." (Matt. 5, 16)

3. But our principal duty to God is to serve Him, for He is our Lord and we are his servants. Now what does it mean to serve? It means to do the will of the superior, to submit oneself to him. But how can we know the will of God in order to serve Him? From various sources.

a. From His *commandments.* They make known to us His most holy will.

b. From His holy *Church.* She is His representative here on earth, the mouthpiece of the Lord to the children of men.

c. From our *conscience,* through which He

speaks to us, to warn us against evil and urge us on to do good.

d. From our *parents* and *superiors,* who take His place in our regard.

e. From the *vocation* which He has given us; for quite often very definite duties come along with it.

f. From evils *permitted* by God, that strike *us* even against our will. In spite of all precautions, *you* get sick,— the permission of God. It is His holy will that you accept this sickness patiently from His hands. You are unjustly slighted, accused and calumniated,— the providence of God. It is His will that you do not complain and murmur, but humble yourself under the hand of God. "Be humbled therefore under the mighty hand of God." (I Peter, 5, 6) The time for you to die arrives: submit yourself; it is the will of God. "Whether we live, we live to the Lord, or whether we die, we die to the Lord. Therefore whether we live or whether we die, we are the Lord's." (Rom. 14, 8)

III. We Must Go Back to God

Now then, if we follow up this our destiny, to honor, to praise and to serve God, what shall we gain by it? *Whither* does this way lead? By it we shall come to God. "I am your reward exceedingly great" (Gen. 15, 1); for we shall be partakers of His blessedness and glory. "Well done, good

and faithful servant: . . . enter thou into the joy of thy Lord." (Matt. 25, 21) By this we shall save our soul from eternal perdition wherewith those are threatened who do not follow up their destiny, those who have left the way which the Lord has mapped out for them unto eternal happiness.

a. How *important* then our destiny is: this business of which we, here upon earth, have charge and care,— the glorification, the praise, and the service of God. On it depends our whole eternity of bliss or misery.

b. It is our *only* business, because for it alone we are here on earth.

c. Precisely because this business is so important and our only one, all other business to which we must attend must be made *subordinate* to this, so that it does not interfere, but supports and promotes our destiny. We must at times ask ourselves, with St. Stanislaus: "What has this to do with eternity?" Is this or that business conducive to my salvation?

d. This is a *personal* business. I can let friends and servants take care of all other business, but of this I must take care myself.

e. It is a *constant* and everyday business, because I am always the servant of God, and He is always my Lord.

f. Furthermore I have this business on hand *but once,* as a concern of my present life. Should I neglect it, I can never repair it, not even in eternity.

Now in conclusion I ask myself:

1. Which is the *pivot* of my life, upon which everything turns, I or God?

2. Which is my *most important business* here on earth, my honor, my praise, my service, the gratification of my passions; or the honor, the praise, and the service of God?

3. Is my life a constant *service* of God, a continuous hymn of praise, a continuous "Glory be to the Father, and to the Son, and to the Holy Ghost"?

In the light of this meditation we now understand our destiny. Let us repent of our many deviations from our course, and give back to our life its right direction to God. "Come let us adore and fall down and weep before the Lord that made us. For He is the Lord our God and we are the people of his pasture, and the sheep of his hand." (Ps. 94, 6 sq.)

II. MEDITATION: END OF CREATURES

8-17

We have now come to a knowledge of the purpose for which we are in this world. But as we are living in the midst of this world, in constant intercourse with so many things about us which

are very often, it is true, useful to us, but which can also become injurious, it is very important that we acquire a clear knowledge of the destiny of the world and of its relation to ourselves. This the little book of the Exercises explains in a few words full of meaning: "All other things on earth have been created for man, and to help him in the pursuit of the end for which he was created."

After we have in thought entered into the act of creation wherein God, by a word of his omnipotence, called the world into existence (Gen. 1), and after we have prayed for light to penetrate the intentions which guided Him in creating, we shall meditate on the rich contents of the words cited above, and shall consider in three points: the *origin* of the world around us; its *object;* and the *use* which we are to make of creatures.

I. The Origin of Creatures

By His omnipotence God called all things into existence: "He spoke and they were made; he commanded and they were created." (Ps. 32, 9) Let us hurry, as in a flight, through the universe and take a close view of the things called into existence by the power of God. A rich harvest will repay our attention.

1. We shall consider carefully the *wide extent* of creation. Who can count the sands on the seashore, the flowers of the fields, the trees of the

forests, the fishes of the sea, the birds in the air, and the stars in the firmament?

2. Then bear in mind the immeasurable *vastness* of the universe. The millions of stars that shine in the canopy of the heavens are so large that our terrestrial globe, which appears to us so vast, is but a little grain of dust compared with any one of them. They are so very far away from us that their light, which travels 186,000 miles a second, requires years, tens of years, hundreds of years, and even more, to reach us.

3. Let us admire the *great variety* of creatures, in form, color, size and properties. More than 366,000 different species of animals have been counted. Every drop of water forms a little world in itself.

4. Consider the *beauty* of the creatures. So beautiful are the flowers of the field that human art, although it has produced wonders, cannot furnish anything like unto them. So grandly does the starry firmament beam forth its splendor that man can but be astonished. How brilliantly the sun stands before our eyes, an ocean of light, the source of warmth for the children of man. And there are thousands of suns and even greater than that which is the center of our planetary system.

5. We marvel at the wonderful *order* which reigns in the universe. Mark the exact regularity of the heavenly bodies in their course! To a second they are always in their exact place. There

is no collision in the countless orbits which they describe. Then consider the uniformity of nature in the individual organism! What perfection of members and instruments, even in the smallest animals, so that one is at a loss what to admire most, the majestic lion of the primeval forest, or the fusoria discovered by the microscope.

After these considerations what should be the fruit of this meditation?

1. We must first of all learn from it the infinite *greatness* and *majesty* of God. "O Lord, our Lord, how admirable is thy name in the whole earth!" (Ps. 8, 2) Therefore let there be praise and admiration.

2. The natural conclusion of this is a profound *reverence* for our Creator, which precludes every offence to so good a God, even in the least particular.

3. This knowledge shall inspire us with holy *zeal* to distinguish ourselves in the service of the Most High. For the greater the Lord, the more perfect should be the service rendered him.

4. Let us learn from it to be *generous* to God. For how generous does God not appear to us in creation! Little would have been sufficient for our needs, but how extravagant does not God show himself to be. He wishes not only to procure the necessaries of life for us, but also the means for its enjoyment. Consider the various colors which light brings out, the magnificent harmonies the musi-

cian draws from the world of sound, or the manifold tastes offered by the world of fruits, etc. Therefore we should be large-hearted and generous towards God. We must not only render the service we are bound to render under pain of mortal sin, we must bargain with Him, but we must try to make it posssible for us to say with our Divine Savior: "I do always the things that please him." (John 8, 29)

At the end of the first part of this meditation let us bear in mind *three* short expressions which a spiritual man of the middle ages made much of: *"Take it";* accept everything from the hand of God because it comes from God. *"Thank Him";* be thankful, because you are living on alms from God. *"Fear Him";* fear the judgment in which you shall have to give an account of all the benefits received from God.

II. The Purposes of Creatures

Precisely because we shall have to give an account of everything, we must examine closely for what purpose God has created this world around us. "For man." We are not then to serve creatures; they must serve us, hence we must rule over them; they must not be the end, but the means. As gifts, as means, as talents, they shall do us no harm, but rather be useful and helpful to us for the attainment of our last end. And how can they be helpful to us? In *five* ways.

1. Because they *reveal* to us the greatness and majesty of God. Precisely for this has God made them so grand, that from them we might pass to the consideration of His greatness and perfection. "For the invisible things of Him, from the creation of the world, are clearly seen, being understood by the things that are made, His eternal power also and His divinity." (Rom. 1, 20) How the omnipotence, the wisdom and the glory of God shine forth through the grandeur of the world! Thus the whole universe asks us to praise and glorify God. Let us heed the invitation!

2. Creatures are helpful to us by their *example*. How faithfully all nature serves its Creator! "He sendeth forth light, and it goeth: and he hath called it and it obeyeth him with trembling. And the stars — were called and they said: Here we are: And with cheerfulness they have shined forth to him that made them." (Bar. 3; 33, 34, 35)? Not only do they serve God faithfully, but they also serve us at God's bidding, although we are often unfaithful in serving God. And they serve us even unto their own destruction, for in our behalf they are entirely consumed. Why then should not we also be entirely consumed in the service of God?

3. Creatures are helpful to us by the *use* we make of them in the attainment of our last end. For to praise God and serve Him we stand in need of nourishment, strength, light, and warmth, etc. And when we make use of creatures to maintain

life, health, and strength, they are helpful to us for the attainment of our last end.

4. They are helpful in enabling us to offer *sacrifice* to God. To grasp this fruitful idea better, we must bear in mind that God is especially honored by sacrifice. The more costly the oblation, the more God is honored by the sacrifice. The more attractive the world and the amusements and pleasures which it promises and offers, the more honorable to God is the sacrifice when for the love of God we abstain from them. This is the reason why God is honored so much by the vows of poverty and chastity. For this reason St. Aloysius stands before our eyes as one so grand, because for the love of Jesus he heroically trampled under foot the world with its honors and joys. For this reason, too, a priest or a missionary zealous in the performance of his duties glorifies God so much because his life is a life of sacrifice. Here we see one reason why God has made this world so beautiful, so attractive, for it gives us ample opportunity to glorify Him by sacrifice. How helpful creatures can thus become to us in the attainment of our last end, if we abstain from them and from the pleasures they offer, magnanimously for the love of God!

5. They are helpful to us in still another way which we must not overlook; for it can be of almost daily use and immensely profitable, as God intends it to be. Among the creatures, in a wider sense,

which should help us to reach our last end, are to be counted all the evils which embitter life and make of this earth a valley of tears; sickness, sufferings, accidents, in fact all that we designate by the little word, *cross*. All these we should accept willingly from the hand of God, and submissively and patiently bear up under them. By *patient endurance* of suffering we praise and glorify God more than by good works which do not call for much trouble and self-conquest. So did Job glorify God more in his misfortune, poverty, sickness, abandonment, and unjust condemnation than he had done formerly when as a rich man he gave alms with a generous hand. To give was not hard for him, but to suffer so much and so patiently was simply heroic! He only said: "The Lord gave, the Lord hath taken away; as it hath pleased the Lord, so be it done. Blessed be the name of the Lord." (Job 1, 21)

Creatures can thus be very conducive to the attainment of our last end: by *instruction*, by *example*, by *use*, by *sacrifice*, and by *patiently* enduring the less agreeable features of life. How truly did St. Paul say: "To them that love God all things work together unto good." (Rom. 8, 28) At the close of this meditation a beautiful picture presents itself before our mind's eye: Man is like unto an artist with a grand work to accomplish. The entire world is his workshop; all the creatures are his implements; the time to accomplish his task

is his earthly life; and the reward is none less than heaven itself. Let us zealously go to work at this our task.

III. The Use of Creatures

After we have come to know the end for which creatures have been made, we shall now ask, how are we to use them? From what has been said, the answer comes to us spontaneously. "Hence it follows," says the little book most clearly, "that man is to make use of them in so far as they help him to attain his last end; and in so far not to use them as they are an impediment to reaching his last end." A wise rule against which no objection can be raised, because it is a rule dictated by reason itself. We make use of this rule in all our business transactions but, strange to say, not in the affair of our eternal salvation. All artists follow this rule; the painter, in the use of colors; the sculptor, in the selection of his materials; the cook, with regard to spices; the sick, in taking medicine. "In so far," so long as they are necessary or useful. But when our salvation is at stake we permit ourselves to be led by sensuality, by inclinations not well regulated, and by comforts. Overstepping all bounds, we make use of creatures to our spiritual detriment, and not to our advantage, in eating and drinking, in entertainment, in sleeping and recreation, in reading and in our dealings with others. The royal Psalmist said: "Thy justifications are

my counsel" (Ps. 118, 24); but alas! we take advice, not from reason enlightened by faith, but too readily from the unregulated inclinations of our sensual nature, inducing us to abuse creatures.

Let me ask myself at the end of this meditation:

1. What view do I take of creatures? Do I perhaps look upon them as my property, of which, as a master, I can dispose at pleasure, and not as a benefice or alms from God? Do I regard them as an end, and not as a means to reach my end? Do I consider them as "talents" for the use of which I must give an exact account to my Lord and Creator?

2. What rule or direction do I follow in the use of creatures? Do I use them simply at pleasure? Do I allow myself to be led by sensuality? Do I closely adhere to the "in so far as," that is, do I see whether they are useful or hurtful to my calling, to my destiny?

3. Do I ask myself what good I derive from all the disagreeable happenings that befall me, since God permitted them especially for my benefit or straightway sent them Himself?

In the light of this meditation we come to realize that we are guilty of a manifold abuse of creatures. Let us repent of it; and in the future let us plan and strive to use the world round about us to our advantage. "To them that love God, all things work together unto good!" (Rom. 8, 28)

SPIRITUAL READING

It is narrated of the venerable Abbot Arsenius that, when he had been appointed to the imperial court at Constantinople, he felt within himself an ardent desire to lead an interior and holy life. While recommending this holy desire to God in prayer, he seemed to hear these words: "Arsenius, withdraw, keep silence, rest and collect yourself." This admonition comes to us also, and is to be applied during these days of the spiritual exercises.

1. *Withdraw.* Avoid distractions, studies, conversations, and all business not absolutely necessary. Be penetrated with the important affair you have in hand. Imitate Nehemias. He had set his heart upon protecting the Jews, who had just returned from the Babylonian captivity, against the sudden attacks of their hostile neighbors, by rapidly rebuilding the walls of the destroyed city of Jerusalem. His constant energy was a thorn in the eyes of his enemies. To hinder him they invited him to a parley. Nehemias, seeing their stratagem, answered: "I am doing a great work, and I cannot come down lest it be neglected while I go down to you." (II Esdr. 6, 3).

2. *Keep silence.* Keeping silence during the spiritual exercises is recommended as very much to the purpose. We shall observe it conscientiously:

a. By preserving the necessary recollection; thus

gaining time for converse with God, with whom we have to confer on many things.

b. Doing this in a spirit of mortification and sacrifice, to obtain from God by this little victory over ourselves richer graces and blessings during the exercises. God usually rewards this sacrifice with special lights and consolations.

c. And doing it in the spirit of penance, for the many abuses of the tongue.

3. *Rest.* Yet this rest must not be idle, but active; the rest of the wayfarer who pauses to gather strength; the rest of the business man who at times withdraws to his room to calculate how to retrieve the loss he has sustained, and to make plans for new profits and new advantages; the rest of the general of an army who in retirement makes out new plans of battles and prepares for new victories; the rest of the statesman who, mindful of the many demands of the public welfare, of the reputation and power of his country, is studying the means which will most effectively promote them. We, too, need rest and recollection during these days, for we have much, very much to do.

a. We must thoroughly search the years of our past life and ferret out when, where, and how we have failed in the pursuit of our destiny and calling, and then bring everything back to working order.

b. We must settle the account of the past by a good confession, and lay the foundation for a new life.

c. We must absorb the rich material of the meditations and let it take root within us. And when these thoughts have penetrated and filled our mind, it will become really enlightened, warmed up, and thoroughly animated by them. In this light we must ennoble and transfigure our lives.

d. This means that we must diligently go to school to our Divine Redeemer, and in His school absorb His spirit, His sentiments, and enter upon His views.

e. It will also be useful to note down some few ideas that have made the most impression on us, because we are forgetful. During these days of plenty we must gather provisions upon which we can live during the time of scarcity which is sure to come. Thus we shall have enough to do during the free time which is repeatedly mentioned in the "Order of the Day" for the exercises. The time here meant is that which is free from any exercise in common, or from meditation strictly so called, but which may be very usefully spent in the way mentioned above.

I. CONSIDERATION: INDIFFERENCE

In the two meditations which we have thus far made we find a doctrine so important that it is worthy of a thorough examination. We read in the little book of Exercises: "Wherefore (because creatures are only means to our last end) it is necessary for us to make ourselves *indifferent* towards all

created things, in so far as it is allowed and granted to the free will to be so."

Wherein does this *indifference* consist? Not in stupidity, not in indolence, nor yet in imperceptibility or insensibility. Indifference does not require such a disposition; nor will it be demanded of us, and we will not succeed in attaining it. Our Savior, who practiced indifference to a heroic degree, felt pain, disregard, and grief most keenly. Indifference requires courage, a determined will (for it is a matter of the will guided by reason), which is not led by sensuality in the choice and use of things, but by their serviceableness to our destiny and calling; a will that allows itself to be ruled by the will of God, and not by self-love. As a result, we can, with our Blessed Redeemer, say within ourselves concerning all things: "Not as I will, but as thou." (Matt. 26, 30) But to acquire this pliableness of the will we must not be predetermined in favor of any creature before we make a decision of any kind, but our minds must be perfectly free. For if we are inclined to one thing or to another beforehand, and are too much attached to it, then this too great attachment will hinder us from readily giving ourselves up to do what reason, faith, and God command.

We shall now consider the necessity of this indifference, inquire wherein we can practice it, and learn to appreciate its advantages.

1. The Necessity of Indifference

a. This necessity is easily seen from what has been said. For if our calling is to serve God, and creatures are but means to this end, reason demands that in the choice and use of them we should not be determined by their beauty and attractiveness, but solely by their usefulness as means to an end. Hence we should not be predisposed in favor of any creature, because this predisposition has an influence upon our choice and misleads us to make imprudent selections. We must cut loose from creatures and be free from bias, so that only their adaptability or the will of God may be the guide in our selection of them.

b. This necessity is readily seen from *comparisons*. The painter, the sculptor, the artist, the cook, or the prudent patient, does not allow himself to be ruled by his preference for colors, implements, materials, remedies, but in the use of them (if he does not wish to spoil his work) is led only by their fitness as means to an end. These men preserve a praiseworthy indifference towards the various means which they use.

c. And, for a truth, whence all the sins, the faults, the crosses, which so often hurt and depress us? They come from the want of indifference. Perhaps we are striving with all our might for honors and dignities; God permits a humiliation, an indignity, a cross. How we cling to our health! God sends

us a sickness, or permits one to come upon us; how hard we take it. Why? Through want of indifference. We forget that in sickness we can glorify God as well as in health, and even better. A religious complained to St. Francis de Sales about the many crosses she had to carry. "Do you know how the cross is made?" asked the saint. "Take two little pieces of wood, lay one parallel upon the other,— no cross. But lay one piece across the other, and the cross is made. So in like manner when our will conforms to the will of God,— no cross. But when our will crosses the will of God, when it is opposed to the will of God, when we murmur and complain,— the cross is ready. If we wish to escape the cross, then we must conform our will to the will of God."

2. The Practice of Indifference

But wherein shall we practice this indifference? In all things in which we are still free, in which God has not yet given a decision. But when God has already decided and fixed a calling for us, then our consent in favor of that call must be given at once, with all the energy of our will. We must not vacillate, but with a mind fixed and firm be in favor of it. St. Ignatius enumerates a few objects about which we must be indifferent so long as God has not made His will known to us; *e. g.*, health and sickness, riches and poverty, honor and dishonor, a long life and a short life, and so in other things, as

talents, consolation, success in our undertakings, etc. In all these matters we must be indifferent, penetrated with the thought that they can all be helpful to us in the service and praise of God; that we can serve and honor God in every state and condition of life which God maps out for us. "For to them that love God all things work together unto good."

3. Advantages of Indifference

a. A mind so disposed possesses *true peace* and permanent rest for the heart. For come what may, it recognizes in all things the will of God, and by doing that will it attains to its destiny.

b. It has not only peace but *joy*, for we know that "all things work unto good for those that love God," that from all things we can derive advantages.

c. This disposition of mind makes easy our efforts to acquire virtue and perfection. When our attachment to creatures is excessive, it becomes more difficult to make the sacrifice which God's service calls for.

How are we to acquire this exalted and, in many cases, certainly difficult disposition? By frequently repeating the last two meditations, the one on the end of man, and the other on the end of creatures. We cannot discover the fountain-head of our many errors except in the misapprehension of this twofold truth. We must not lose courage even if we do not find in ourselves this exalted frame of mind. We must gradually work ourselves up to it.

At the conclusion of this consideration we shall ask ourselves:

1. About what do I principally complain and murmur? There indifference is wanting; I caught myself in the very act.

2. Is my will prepared for all that God is likely to ask of me, or to prepare for me? I say "is likely," because we are not going to dwell upon groundless and useless apprehensions of the future.

3. Is my heart too passionately attached to something, to a creature, to an occupation, to an office or position, so that the separation would be at the cost of a hard fight? I shall begin even now to disengage my heart, that the possible sacrifice be not too bitter for me.

III. END OF MAN

Repetition of the Meditation

The meditation on the end of man is so truly fundamental and of such importance that we may be perfectly satisfied if we are thoroughly penetrated by it and regulate our life accordingly. If our life is a continuous praise of God and constantly in His service, then our life is perfect, holy. To make our resolution still stronger we shall repeat it and apply it to the words of the preface of the holy Mass. The priest invites the worshippers, "And let us thank the Lord our God." And in the name of the people the server answers: "It is meet and just."

"Truly," resumes the priest as he begins the preface, "it is meet and just, fair and salutary for us to thank Thee always and everywhere." These *four* words give us four different motives which ought to urge us to honor, praise, and serve God with all the fervor at our command.

The preparation for this meditation is the same as the one for the first meditation.

1. *It is Meet*

a. Of a truth it behooves us to praise and serve God, because our Lord and God is infinitely great. What honor is not bestowed upon earthly greatness, upon the princes of this world! But who can measure himself with the Lord our God? "Who is as the Lord our God who dwelleth on High?" (Ps. 112, 5) He is the Lord of Lords and the King of Kings. It behooves us then to show Him all honor. And honorable indeed it is for us to be allowed to serve Him. Yes, we must be astonished that He deigns to accept our service when we reflect on how extremely critical earthly princes are, and that they do not readily take into their service the first one that comes along.

b. We cannot apply our talents and abilities to better advantage than in the service of the Most High. Are we ambitious? It is here we can in a lawful manner satisfy our ambition. To convince you of this, compare the service of God with every other service. If we do not serve God we must

spend ourselves in the service of the world, of creatures, or in the service of ourselves. But what is this perishable world, what am I, what are creatures which exist to-day and to-morrow are no more, in comparison with God, the source of all that is good, of all that makes for happiness?

c. It is honorable to serve God when we consider the society in which we serve Him. We serve Him in union with all creatures, for the whole universe serves God. We serve Him in union with so many noble-minded souls who are scattered over the face of the whole world, and in their holy enthusiasm are serving God most fervently: "I am a partaker with all of them that fear thee, and that keep thy commandments." (Ps. 188, 63) We serve God in union with all the angels, whose only calling is to praise and glorify God. We serve God in union with Mary, the motto of whose life was: "Behold, I am the handmaid of the Lord; be it done to me according to thy word." (Luke 1, 38) Yes, we serve God in union with our Divine Redeemer Himself, who had no other wish and no other will than to glorify his heavenly Father. (John 6, 38) Is it, then, not an honor in unison with these to contribute our share to the great work of glorifying God?

2. *It is Just*

Yes, we *owe* it to God to give Him all the honor possible, and to render Him the most perfect service.

a. We owe this to Him because He is our *Lord* and Creator, to whom we are indebted for all that we have, soul and body, intellect and will, the five senses, health, talents and power. We are all the more bound to this because our faculties have been given us precisely for this purpose: "And every one that calleth upon my name, I have created him for my glory, I have formed him and made him." (Is. 43, 7) Whenever we deny Him our service we are guilty of a real injustice. Moreover, God insists upon this His right, as we see from the parable of the talents. (Matt. 25, 14)

b. We are bound to belong entirely to God, body and soul, and therefore to spend ourselves in His service, because of our *redemption* from eternal perdition. Therefore St. Paul calls out to us: "You are not your own, for you are bought with a great price. Glorify and bear God in your body." (I Cor. 6, 19)

c. We owe to God a healtfelt service because of the special *benefits* which He has so lavishly showered upon us during our life-time. For instance, He called us in preference to a thousand others to the priestly dignity, or to the religious life. "Unto whom much is given, of him much shall be required." (Luke 12, 48) In this case we are in duty bound to be distinguished above the laity in the service of God.

3. *It is Fair*

a. To understand the propriety of serving God, not only of serving Him in the ordinary way, but from the abundance of our hearts, and with all the strength at our command, we must bear in mind how little God asks of us, whereas He could demand of us with a perfect right the greatest sacrifices and the most difficult services. He asks less than men often ask from men, lords from their servants, and princes from their subjects.

b. We must bear in mind what men do for men. Think of the soldier, especially in time of war. He must be prepared to give his life for his country. Look at the factories where the workmen are degraded to the level of irrational machines. Go down into the dark caverns of a mine where thousands of human beings are as if buried alive, in constant danger of death. Think of the men occupied on railroads who, they say, and not without reason, stand with one foot in the grave and with the other in prison. Count the servants who are often treated with less consideration than irrational brutes. Now if human beings at the expense of their liberty, their health, and life itself, serve mortal masters, to whom they are indebted for almost nothing save a trifle as a wage, is it not proper for us to give ourselves up with cheerful hearts perfectly to do the holy will of God, to whom we owe

all we have and possess, who treats us with every consideration, whom to serve is an honor?

c. When we consider what the evil spirit and his accomplices, wicked men, are doing, what sacrifices they make, what pains they take, without any advantage to themselves, yea, at the cost of greater pain, to induce the servants of God to fall and become unfaithful to their Lord, is it right that we should be indifferent and look on with folded arms? Should we not rather develop within ourselves a like energy for the glory of the Most High and the service of the Lord?

4. *It is Salutary*

We should distinguish ourselves the more in the service and praise of God the more beneficial and useful it is for us. As human beings we are very greedy. Where the greater pay allures, thither the crowd goes. The highest *bidder* has the most *customers*. But what reward awaits us when we serve God?

a. An *infinite* reward: "I am thy reward exceedingly great." (Gen. 15, 1)

b. An *eternal* reward: "The just" shall enter "into eternal life." (Matt. 25, 46)

c. A reward measured by our deserts. For every good work, even the very least, will receive its reward; every word spoken in honor of God, every step taken in His behalf, every tear shed in His service, will receive its exceedingly great reward. Now, if men day after day, without rest or repose,

often amid untold sacrifices, exhaust themselves for a temporal, earthly and perishable reward, does not ordinary prudence, that inborn greed within us, demand that we give ourselves entirely to the service of God and distinguish ourselves in it?

d. Aye, and even more so; for woe to us if we neglect the service of God or break away from Him. "The unprofitable servant shall he cast out into exterior darkness. There shall be weeping and gnashing of teeth!" (Matt. 25, 30) God must guard His right to rule. Justice requires that he who has not served should receive no reward. He remains excluded from the eternal reward which God Himself wishes to be; he loses God, and draws upon himself all the horrors of hell.

It is meet and just, fair and salutary, to praise God, to honor and serve Him. Heretofore my resolutions must be:

1. I want to serve God. "O Lord, my portion, I have said, I would keep thy law." (Ps. 118, 57)

2. But I want to serve God not in an ordinary manner, but zealously. I must distinguish myself in the service of God, become a great servant of God, because God is infinitely great, and to such a Lord we must render good service. "Thou hast commanded thy commandments to be kept most diligently." (Ps. 118, 4)

3. Therefore I want to serve God with all my strength and all my talents. All that is within me must be devoted to His service.

SECOND DAY

SIN, THE GREATEST EVIL

"Know thou and see that it is an evil and bitter thing to have left the Lord thy God." (Jer. 2, 19)

"Have mercy on me, O God, according to thy great mercy." (Ps. 50, 3)

"Flee from sin as from the face of a serpent." (Eccl. 21, 2)

IV. MEDITATION: THE TRIPLE SIN

To strengthen ourselves the more in our firm resolution to attain our destiny, which is to praise God, to honor Him, and to serve Him, it is very much to our purpose to cast a glance into that gruesome abyss of wickedness, sin. Sin involves the opposite of God's praise and honor and service; it is a retreat from our destiny, a refusal to serve God. By this glance we shall convince ourselves that sin is the greatest evil that can befall a human being. Penetrated by this thought, we shall make every effort to protect ourselves most carefully against it, and not only ourselves but also those entrusted to our care. We must be all the more convinced of this because the world plays with sin, considers it a slight, pardonable weakness, a mere trifle. We shall now approach a series of meditations that must produce as fruit a thorough knowledge of the malice of

sin; and from the consciousness of our own grievous sins there should result a salutary shame, a heartfelt contrition, and a firm resolve nevermore to commit sin, however great the inducement may be. We shall begin by meditating on the consequences of grievous sin in the case of others, and we shall consider the triple sin: the sin of the *angels,* the sin of our *first parents,* and the sin of so *many* who have sinned less than I have.

First and second preludes. Imagine yourselves infected all over by the most repulsive leprosy of sin; and pray for a salutary shame of having committed more sins than so many others, and of deserving damnation.

I. The Sin of the Angels

In the beginning of time God called into existence sublime spirits without number, far more perfect than we poor children of men, and He endowed them with all the gifts of nature and grace. What happened? Many of them, blinded by their advantages, rose up against their Lord and Creator and sinned. And what was the consequence? "God spared not the angels that sinned, but delivered them, drawn down by infernal ropes to the lower hell, into torments." (II Pet. 2, 4.) Consider:

1. Who judged and punished thus? God, who can reward beyond deserts, but who cannot punish beyond guilt. He who judges without passion and without haste, proceeds and acts calmly and quietly.

2. Whom did God punish thus? *Angels;* without taking into consideration their exalted nature, their rank, and their number, which was very great.

3. Why did He punish them thus? Because of *one* sin.

4. How did He punish them? Without *delay*, without granting them time for conversion and repentance, although they had never before seen a deterring example of His avenging justice.

5. What punishment did He inflict upon them? A simple *terrific* one; for they had to leave heaven. Our Divine Savior says: "I saw Satan like lightning falling from heaven." (Luke 10, 18) They were thrust down into the *prison* of hell, condemned to its fire (Matt. 25, 41) for all *eternity*.

Now my soul, what do you say? What will happen to me? I am not an angel; I have sinned, not only once, but many times; I have known from revelation the severity of the avenging justice of God; I have been pardoned often; I have repeatedly broken my word and my resolutions after having vowed to amend. How ashamed must I not be as I stand before the judgment seat of God? If the angels were punished thus, what do I deserve? But God has spared me: "The mercies of the Lord that we are not consumed." (Lam. 3, 22)

II. The Sin of Our First Parents

1. Represent to yourself the happy state of Adam and Eve in paradise. They are, body and soul, the

immediate work of God, and hence perfect, endowed with all natural advantages, to which were added their supernatural gifts. They are not subject to death or to irregular desires; they cannot be approached by pain and diseases; they are free from all anxiety about their nourishment. In the midst of a garden of pleasure which produces all imaginable delights, they are gifted with a keen understanding and a rich fund of knowledge. They are the adopted children of God, and heirs of heaven. Nothing is wanting to their happiness. Here is the precise reason why they are envied by the fallen spirits, and why Satan desires to make them co-partners of his fall and of his misfortune.

2. He seduced Eve to break the commandment of God, and she seduced her husband. The sin is complete.

3. Now consider the consequences, the punishment that follows immediately. Grace is lost and the sonship of God. Sensuality wakes and a legion of unregulated, sinful inclinations rebel against the dominion of reason. Death enters, "and by sin, death," and with it the whole army of diseases and pains that are its forerunners. Our first parents incur the penalty of death. "For in what day soever thou shalt eat of it, thou shalt die the death." (Gen. 2, 17) They are banished from paradise and condemned to compulsory labor. "In the sweat of thy face shalt thou eat bread,"— and that for hundreds of years, "till thou return to the earth

out of which thou wast taken." (Gen. 3, 19) And after death, what sad prospects for eternity! Exclusion from the eternal, supernatural bliss for which they were destined, and participation in the sad lot of the fallen spirits. But this does not exhaust the consequences of the sin of our first parents. These consequences befell their children and their children's children, and the entire human race.

Because of this sin all the millions of men must die; for the first sin is the main root of all the ills that oppress the human race. Do but hasten as if on wings through all the misery which the sin of our first parents had in its train, and try to fathom what sin is in the eye of God,— sin which provoked Him thus and for thousands of years brought such punishments on numberless members of our race, and will continue to bring the same during all the time to come.

In order not to exaggerate, we assigned all the ills that oppress the human race to original sin as the main root. But original sin is not the *only* cause; for it cannot be denied that an endless amount of misery is the consequence of the *personal* sins of men, and without any *necessary* connection with original sin. Original sin results in exclusion from supernatural bliss, the "pain of loss"; but *personal* sin, which men commit by their own free choice, adds a "pain of sense" to the pain of loss.

How shall I fare who have sinned so often, even

after I had known the severity of God's avenging justice from revelation? What salutary fear will come over me, and how shall I stand before the tribunal of God's justice, ashamed in the consciousness of my many sins? What am I to think of sin after such a judgment? How thankful must I be to God, for I can attribute it only to His mercy that I am not among the lost!

III. The Sins of Individuals

Think of the sins of so many who are suffering in hell who have not sinned as often as I, and who have not received as many graces. What, therefore, have I deserved? What must I expect? "The mercies of the Lord that we are not consumed." This warns me to form my judgment of sin according to the judgment of God, to consider it the greatest evil that man can meet with.

In conclusion, let us go to Calvary and look upon the crucified Redeemer in His terrible suffering. Let us ask Him, why He has debased Himself so deeply and suffered so much? "For your sins," is the answer from the cross. What, then, must sin be? How terrified must I not be since I am conscious that my sins have contributed to the bitter sufferings of my innocent Redeemer! And what have I done for my Savior, who has suffered so much? What do I owe Him, and what am I going to do for Him in future? Naturally, I must hate and detest grievous sin which nailed Him to the

cross; I must repent of it from my heart, and must carefully avoid and flee from it.

O my loving Redeemer, by Thy most precious blood which Thou didst shed for me on the cross, have mercy on me; reconcile me to Thy heavenly Father, whom I have so often offended.

V. MEDITATION: PERSONAL SIN

After we have been terrified at the sight of God's grievous punishment of sin in others, and after we have considered what a great evil it is in itself, let us look into ourselves to see whether we have not perhaps and even more than once been guilty of sin. We must see what sad consequences it had in us; how we must make every effort to rid ourselves of it, and to avoid it in future. "Flee from sin as from the face of a serpent." (Eccl. 21, 2) Our watchword should be: "Rather die than commit a mortal sin."

The preludes will be the same as in the preceding meditation. Let us pray for fervent contrition and heartfelt sorrow, while we call to mind and ponder over our sins. "My eyes have sent forth the springs of water, because they have not kept thy law." (Ps. 118, 136)

I

As an introduction to this meditation let us cast a hurried glance over our past life to convince our-

selves of our sinfulness, of the leprosy with which we are infected before God. Without entering upon an exact examination of our conscience, let us consider the ten, twenty, forty, or more *years* which we have thus far lived. Perhaps we shall scarcely find one free from a grievous sin, and perhaps several with more than one. Then let us examine the *five senses* of our body, the *powers* of our soul; all desecrated and withdrawn from the service of God. We have sinned with our eyes, our ears, our tongue, through stubbornness, self-love, self-will, wilfulness, and selfishness; we have abused all our faculties. We must bear in mind the *commandments* of God and His Church, so many of which we have broken; the *duties* of our *calling,* which we have neglected; the *capital sins* of which we have become guilty; the *graces* and the *sacraments* which we have abused.

Let us recall the *places,* hidden and public, where we stayed, as our parental home, the church, the school, which we desecrated by our sins.

Then let us not forget the *persons* against whom we have sinned, in thought, word and deed: our parents, our superiors, our brethren, our inferiors. We must not forget those whom we have induced to commit sin by our bad example and by the scandal we gave.

II

This short examination is very beneficial. It wakes us up from our sleep of sin, arouses us from

the lethargy to which we have given ourselves, puts us in mind of our debt to God, urges us to return with the Prodigal to do penance. We should sigh with him: "I have gone astray like a sheep that is lost: seek thy servant." (Ps. 118, 176)

In order to convince ourselves of the *grievousness* of sin, we should cast a glance into the threefold abyss which it contains. It contains within itself an abyss of the most hateful *ingratitude,* an abyss of terrible *misfortune,* and an abyss of detestable malice. Let this be the subject-matter of this meditation, which we divide into three points.

I. The Abyss of Ingratitude

Sin encloses within itself an abyss of the most hateful *ingratitude.* For what does man do when he sins?

a. He returns *evil* for good. Instead of thanking God for innumerable benefits, he offends Him and despises His holy will. Rightly can God reproach the sinner in the words of Moses: "Is this the return thou makest to the Lord, O foolish and senseless people? Is he not thy father, that hath possessed thee, and made thee, and created thee? . . . Thou hast forsaken the God that begot thee, and hast forgotten the Lord that created thee." (Deut. 32, 6, 18)

b. But the ingratitude of the sinner is still more contemptible because he *abuses* the very benefits of God to offend his benefactor. For wherewith does

man sin? With the eyes which God gave him; with the ears which God opened for him; with the tongue which God loosened for him; with all the powers and abilities which God bestowed upon him.

c. This ingratitude becomes still greater because man offends God at the *very moment* in which God is conferring benefits upon him and is thinking of new benefits. For the very moment in which we sin God preserves us in being, gives us health and strength of body and soul, and protects us against the heavenly powers who are but too eager to avenge themselves on us wretched creatures for offending their Lord and God. Think of it, how He brings us to a better knowledge of ourselves, to contrition, and to return, and then, notwithstanding our sins, makes us partakers of eternal bliss.

d. And if we are *priests*, what ingratitude are we not loading upon ourselves, after our dear Divine Redeemer has so favored us? He has prefered us to thousands and thousands of others, assigned us to a position of honor in His Church, intrusted to us souls who are dear to Him and whom He bought with His precious blood, and has such loving intercourse with us at daily Communion in Holy Mass. This ingratitude forces from Him the lamentable rebuke which we ought to take very much to heart: "For if my enemy had reviled me, I would verily have borne with it. And if he that hated me had spoken great things against me, I would perhaps have hidden myself from him. But thou, a man of

one mind, my guide and my familiar, who didst take sweetmeats together with me: in the house of God we walked with consent." (Ps. 54, 13 sq.) This ingratitude we should take very much to heart. No, nevermore will I be so ungrateful to my good God and to the Sacred Heart. When the pagan governor urged St. Polycarp, the aged bishop of Smyrna, to deny his faith, the venerable servant of God, in the very face of the blazing funeral pyre he was about to ascend, answered him thus: "It is eighty-six years since I began to serve the Lord, and never has He done anything against me: How can I now have the heart to blaspheme my King who has redeemed me?" Beautiful words, which I must repeat when passion, the world, and the evil spirit tempt me to sin.

II. The Abyss of Misery

Grievous sin contains not only an abyss of hateful ingratitude, but also of unspeakable *misery*. We shall touch upon only a few sad consequences which it produces in the soul.

a. Till now in its baptismal grace, the soul has been innocent and *beautiful*, an object of delight for God and his whole heavenly court. The image of God gloriously shines forth in it, as do the lines of similitude of Him who is "beautiful above the sons of men." (Ps. 44, 3) And now how deformed in the sight of God and his saints! No disease, no leprosy can so disfigure man as sin disfigures the

soul; so that if it departed this life in that state, it would needs hear the words: "Depart from me, ye cursed."

b. Till now the innocent one was a *child* of *God,* a brother of Jesus Christ, a temple of the Holy Ghost; by sin he becomes a child of wrath, a slave of the evil spirit. Can we think of a greater degradation? The debasement of a lost son, a child well brought up, of good parents, is but a faint picture of the degradation of a human being fallen into mortal sin.

c. Before the sin the innocent one was *rich* in graces and merits; for all the good done in this state has a golden value, meritorious for eternity, and in the days of innocence so much was done. But all this is lost by mortal sin. To the sinner these words may be applied: "Because thou sayest: I am rich and made wealthy, and have need of nothing; and knowest thou not that thou art wretched, and miserable, and poor and blind, and naked." (Apoc. 3, 17)

Before sinning the innocent man led a supernatural life, a life of *grace.* Sin robs him of this life. He dies, and how grewsome is his death! Death is the more disastrous, the higher the scale of life in which the creature was. A withered flower displeases, but not so very much, because the life of a plant is the lowest in the scale of life. More unpleasant is the extinct life of an animal, because animal life is more perfect. The corpse of a man

scares us, and it takes time and self-conquest to become accustomed to the sight. Why? Because human life is considerably more perfect. But how much higher and more perfect is the supernatural life of grace. Therefore, in the light of faith and in the eyes of the angels and saints, the condition of the soul that has lost this life is much more gruesome.

No earthquake, no conflagration, no flood in the richest fields of the earth can bring about a devastation as great as mortal sin does in the paradise of an innocent soul. What a folly the sinner commits who at such a loss flings away the grace of God. His folly is much greater than Esau's, who sold his birthright for a mess of pottage (Gen. 25, 29 sq.) This deed he afterwards bitterly repented of (Heb. 12, 17). When we think of the ruin wrought by mortal sin in such a soul, we can with much more reason join in the lamentation of Jeremias at the sight of the ruins of the holy city. We shall intone this lamentation because of the sad consequences of sin in our soul, and then address to ourselves the beautiful words wherewith the Church concludes during Holy Week: "Jerusalem, Jerusalem (my soul, my soul), be converted to the Lord thy God."

III. The Abyss of Malice

Mortal sin contains an abyss of *malice*. For grievous sin is an *offence* against God. Few but weighty words. The gravity of an offence, and

hence its malice, is measured by the difference between the person offended and the offender. The more exalted the former and the lower the latter, the more grievous is the offence. But who is God and who am I? The more easily to realize the difference and opposition, consider what you are compared to all men, to the whole human race. A mere cipher, a speck of dust, a drop of water compared to the ocean. What are all men in comparison with the heavenly court? Miserable beings. And what are all the angels when weighed against God? "Behold the gentiles are as a drop in a bucket, and are counted as the smallest grain of a balance; behold the islands are as a little dust." (Isa. 40, 15) Hence what am I in comparison with God? And to become still more penetrated with my nothingness when compared with God, let me review the perfections of God. God is so infinitely wise, and I so ignorant; God all-powerful, who poises the universe on His fingers, and I so impotent, scarcely able to move a rock from its place; God immense, and I bound to space and place; God from eternity, I but from yesterday; God infinite and perfect, and I so limited and imperfect. And yet I, a mite, have dared to say to God: "I will not serve. You have indeed forbidden, but for all that I'll do it, I do not care for your will." What malice!

b. To this malice is allied *presumption*. Or is it not rashness to sin before His eyes, in His pres-

ence? If children wish to violate the precepts of their parents, they do so secretly, behind their backs; not so the sinner, who breaks the command of God openly, before His very eyes.

c. The sinner's demeanor is indeed very *bold,* because he dares to offend Him in whose hands he is. On His hands depends life and death, heaven and hell.

In the light of this meditation, let us try to see the entire malice that lies in sin, and in the consciousness of our own sins our hearts shall be filled with repentance. "My eyes have sent forth springs of water: because they have not kept thy law." (Ps. 118, 136) For no price will I commit another grievous sin; it is the greatest misfortune that can befall me. In comparison with it, sickness, poverty, neglect, calumny, death, and all that the world calls evil, are not worth considering. "I have sworn and am determined to keep thy judgments and thy justice." (Ps. 118, 106) "Have mercy on me, O God, according to thy great mercy. And according to the multitude of thy tender mercies blot out my iniquity." (Ps. 50, 3) My Jesus, Mercy! Most Sacred Heart of Jesus have mercy on me!

SPIRITUAL READING: VENIAL SIN

After St. John Berchmans had died (Aug. 13, 1625), his brethren, who had witnessed his edifying death, hastened to tell a pious father all about it.

Every one had something edifying to say about the saint. One praised his punctual obedience, another his amiable modesty, a third his obliging charity. At last one especially emphasized his angelic innocence, that he had never deliberately and knowingly committed even a venial sin. Then the pious man of God sighed and said: Can there be any Christian who would knowingly and deliberately commit a venial sin?

So great an evil did this servant of God consider even a venial sin. Are we in earnest when we resolve to avoid mortal sin above all things? Then we must extend our resolution also *to venial* sin. Without this resolution we can hardly succeed in always avoiding mortal sin.

But not to ask too much, or the impossible, we must promise an important difference. There are venial sins that are committed with a full *knowledge* and on purpose, as a deliberate lie told to get out of a difficulty, or self-praise to make oneself important, etc. Other venial sins are faults that follow rather the weakness, the haste, the thoughtlessness, the carelessness of poor human nature, as distractions in prayer, a sudden impatience and excitement because something unpleasant strikes us, or vanity because we have met with success in our undertakings, etc. The former we can with the grace of God avoid, and to them by preference our resolution must extend. The weaknesses we shall never avoid altogether, as the Council of Trent

teaches us, without a special privilege, such as the Mother of God enjoyed. God permits them for our mortification and humiliation, to keep us fervent and energetic. If we cannot avoid them all, we must not therefore be unconcerned about them, but make an honest offort to reduce their number, just as we try by frequently brushing to remove the dust, although we cannot get rid of it entirely. Hence our resolution should run thus: I shall carefully avoid all deliberate venial sins, I shall do all I can to reduce the number of my daily faults and imperfections.

To rouse ourselves and quicken our courage to take this good resolution, let us first take a glance at the remarkably *great* number of the venial sins and faults that gradually steal into our soul; and then try to realize what a great *evil* they are.

I

To make some kind of a survey of the *multitude* of our venial sins, let us go back through the years and days of our life. Scarcely a day have we spent in a blameless manner. Let us recall the *places* where we stayed, look at the *persons* with whom we associated, at the *senses* of our body and the *powers* of our soul, which we have desecrated, at the *duties* we have neglected, at the graces we have abused, at the *bad example* we have given, by word or deed. Their number certainly is greater than the number of hairs on our head; the Church is right when it

teaches its priests to offer the holy Sacrifice "for the innumerable sins, offences, and negligences." The brighter the day, and the more keen-sighted the eye, the better we are able to discover the spots and the dust which weak eyes will scarcely detect. And when a ray of sunshine penetrates a dark room, we see the air filled with particles of dust, where we otherwise suspected nothing. Hence the saints, who were really keen-sighted and enlightened by the Holy Ghost, acknowledged their sinfulness in eloquent terms and many of them confessed daily, while others only admired virtues.

This retrospect of our sinfulness, even if it should startle us with its glaring light, must not make us despondent or yield to despair; but it should rather give us a salutary energy and cause us to blush for shame, and learn humility. It should induce us to cleanse our souls by a truly repentant confession. It should urge us to use effective means to avoid deliberate sin altogether, to diminish our daily faults and weaknesses, and thus by a clean heart to become more pleasing to our Lord.

II

Let us further consider the *grievousness* of venial sin. Like mortal sin it, too, is an *offence* against God. But God is infinitely great, and therefore even the least offence to infinite majesty is a very great evil. If men are careful not to offend by a mistake the earthly master — mere dust and ashes

— whom they serve, and all the more careful the higher is his rank and dignity, what attention is not due to almighty God, whom the entire heavenly host acclaims without intermission as holy, holy, holy? And if the friend, the child, the bridegroom, is on his guard even against a shadow of offence to the dear friend, the good father, the chosen bride, what delicate attention must we show Him who is ours to love with our whole heart and with all our strength (Matt. 22, 37), because He, the infinite Goodness, contains in Himself all beauty and perfection?

2. Venial sin is a *defilement* of the soul. The more precious the garment, the more displeasing is a stain on it. The more magnificent the painting, the more offensive the least disfigurement on it to the eye of the connoisseur. But now since the just man is adorned with the stately robe of sanctifying grace, his soul is a brilliant image of God; and the eyes of God are keen-sighted and penetrating. How unlovely therefore in the sight of the Most High does the soul of the just man become when stained by venial sin. We are by nature very desirous to please; hence we are ashamed to appear with blotched face, unclean hands, soiled clothes, in respectable society; and the more so, the more respectable the society is. How ashamed must we not be to appear stained by venial sin before the angels and saints, before the whole heavenly court, before Mary, before the Divine Heart in the tabernacle,

before the most holy Trinity? The holy souls who die tainted with these stains are so ashamed of themselves that they prefer to throw themselves into the lowest depth of purgatory and forego for a while the vision of God, to be first cleansed from their stains, rather than enter into heaven with them. What a detestable evil venial sin must be!

3. Venial sin shows its malicious character in this that it paves the way to *mortal* sin. The just do not usually fall into mortal sin suddenly. Their fall, when it does come, comes gradually. They begin with venial sin; they play with it, they yield to their inclinations, and by yielding frequently, strengthen them. Their conscience becomes callous; and then suddenly, when a storm of a seductive temptation to commit mortal sin arises, they yield and fall. They fall, because by yielding on former occasions they enfeebled their power to resist, and deadened the sensitiveness of their consciences. Thus Judas fell. He kept the common purse of the apostles. Covetousness awoke in him, and he appropriated some of the community's money. "He was a thief," says St. John. (12, 6) Of course, he took but little, because the fund of the apostles was small. By these little thefts covetousness grew stronger in Judas. An opportunity presented itself for gaining a larger sum of money by betraying his Lord. He becomes weak and yields to the temptation. "He that contemneth small things, shall fall little by little." (Eccl. 19, 1) In this way a priest

may easily fall into grievous sins against chastity. He begins with jokes, familiarities, or by obscene reading, etc. The delicacy of his conscience becomes blunted, and sin soon enters. If we were in earnest when we made our resolution to avoid grievous sin, the firm resolution not to play with venial sin should serve as an advance guard and a bulwark.

4. We see that venial sin is no small evil in the sight of God, from the *punishment* which God already in this life and still more in the next, inflicts even on the souls very dear to Him. Thus Moses, otherwise a mighty man of God, because of his mistrust, was excluded from the Promised Land when he was just at its entrance, from a land for which he had yearned so eagerly, and for which he had for forty years done and suffered so much. Oza, who had imprudently touched the ark of the covenant, was punished with sudden death. (II Kings 6, 6) Who will describe the pains of purgatory with which God hereafter punishes the least sins that have not been atoned for in this life? How many graces, by the help of which His servants would have done so much good, God withdraws from them for faults committed through levity. If we wish to secure abundant graces for ourselves or for the benefit of others, we must see to it with anxious care that we do not trifle away the blessings of God by venial sin. We should imitate the saints, who strove to avoid

the very shadow of sin and to preserve a delicate conscience that is frightened away from mortal sin.

Just one word about the *causes* of venial sins and faults, and about the *means* to become entirely free from deliberate venial sins, and at least to diminish the number of our faults and failures.

The first *cause* is *sloth.* When this vice rules us, venial sin and faults thrive luxuriantly. The remedy for it is fervor, for experience tells us that venial sin will disappear as a fog before the sun when we are all aglow with fervor.

The second *cause* is a want of *watchfulness* and of *mortification* of the senses. If we let our senses roam about freely, the spirit of the world will soon take hold of us. All kinds of distraction will appear, and with them temptations. The spirit being already weak, will be taken by surprise and yield, now to this, then to that fault.

The *third cause* is *conceit.* Whoever over-estimates his own powers, is over-confident in himself, takes too little heed of danger, and is less careful to avoid occasions, will soon learn from his own experience how weak he is. And the Lord will the sooner permit him to take a false step, the more he trusts in himself and prefers himself to others. Pride goes before a fall. Ascetics gave us a view of this in an apt comparison. If one has to walk on a slippery and rough road and holds his head high, he will soon tumble or slip. If he wishes to avoid this, he

must stoop and walk along discreetly, that is humbly. "Before I was humbled," says the Psalmist, "I offended." (118, 67)

If we are in earnest when we take a resolution against grievous sin, we must take up the fight against venial sin with unshaken firmness, and consider it no small evil with which we can afford to play. We must be zealous, watch the various occasions, not trust too much to ourselves, and be discreet and humble. Then with the grace of God we shall avoid all deliberate venial sin and shall considerably diminish the cloud of human weaknesses and miseries. As a final result our life will be free from sin so far as it is possible for the life of poor mortals to be. Let us have courage and confidence.

II. CONSIDERATION, PENANCE

The more we realize the malice of sin, the more determined we should be, if we are guilty of grievous sin, to use every effort in effecting a reconciliation with God. What is necessary for this? Theologians of the schools tell us very well in these words: "The heart's *contrition*, the mouth's *confession*, the satisfaction *deed*." All must work together — thought, word and deed — in our reconciliation. Let us examine these requisites more closely for our edification and instruction.

I. Contrition

Most necessary to obtain forgiveness of sins is *heartfelt contrition,* a repentant disposition of mind. Without this no confession, no penance, will avail; but with it, forgiveness of sins is often obtained without confession and without penance. Hence the Council of Trent (Ses. 14, Chap. 1 & 4) explains that heartfelt sorrow for sins has at all times been necessary to obtain forgiveness of sins. St. Augustine says: "And one can say that he does not sin; but after he has sinned, the most uncultivated dare not assert that he is not bound to do penance."

We must distinguish a twofold contrition; one *perfect,* whose motive is the pure love of God; and the other *imperfect,* whose motive or inducement does not soar so high. Of course during these days of spiritual recollection we must endeavor to make an act of perfect contrition. We shall therefore briefly consider perfect contrition, first, in its effects, then in its marks, and lastly in its frequent practice.

II. Effects of Perfect Contrition

The effects of perfect contrition are wonderful, for it blots out all grievous sins if their number be ever so great. Scarcely had David said from his heart: "I have sinned against the Lord" (II Kings, 12, 13), than he heard from the mouth of Nathan the prophet: "The Lord also hath taken away thy sin." And the Lord assures the sinner by the mouth

of Ezechiel the prophet (33, 12): "The wickedness of the wicked shall not hurt him, in what day soever he shall turn from his wickedness." Yes, perfect contrition not only blots out sin, but when it is very fervent it even effaces the temporal punishment which often remains to be paid after the guilt and the eternal punishment have been remitted. In this it reaches the effectiveness of baptism, and becomes a second baptism. But to have this effect, it must be supernatural; universal, *i. e.,* extending to all mortal sins; contain a firm resolution earnestly to avoid sin; and the will to receive baptism or absolution.

III. The Marks of True Contrition

Sometimes the doubt may occur to one, Have I really true contrition? To become easy about that, I propose *three* questions to myself:

a. Am I at ease and content having committed this and this sin? If I can answer, "No, I do not feel right about this and that," I have signs of repentance.

b. Why am I not easy about having thus offended? Because God is not satisfied with me; because I have offended my best and greatest benefactor, my loving Father, the Sacred Heart of Jesus most worthy of my love; because I have been so ungrateful to Him. These are signs of a good contrition.

c. Will I freely, deliberately, with my eyes open,

commit this same sin again? No, never again will I in full consciousness have the heart to commit another sin. These are the marks of *true* contrition. That it be *perfect* depends upon the motive, which must be perfect love, loving God for *His own sake*.

IV. Practice of Perfect Contrition

One day a band of theological students visited the pious and learned Cardinal Franzelin in Rome. When they were about to bid him farewell, he recommended to them the practice of frequently making an act of perfect contrition; and he also exhorted them to insist both in the pulpit and in the confessional upon this practice when in future they should become pastors. The reason for this is the danger of death to which we are so easily and in an unforeseen manner exposed, in earthquakes, railroad collisions, etc., when it is scarcely possible to have a priest to attend us; and if we cannot confess, then only perfect contrition can help us. And if we have acquired the practice of making acts of perfect contrition, it will be easy for us to make one and thus secure our salvation. But if we have not the practice, we may, in the confusion and agony, easily forget and omit the act.

V. Confession

It is very hard for the sensual man to confess his sins, especially when they are grievous and hidden.

But when we consider all the advantages of holy confession, we shall esteem it, love it, and willingly practice it. The words of Naaman's servants, so solicitous for the bodily welfare of their lord, are to the point when addressed to the sinner: "If the prophet had bid thee to do some great thing, surely thou shouldst have done it. How much rather what he now hath said to thee: Wash, and thou shalt be clean?" (IV Kings 5, 13) We shall hurriedly touch upon the advantages of confession.

1. It is a *Sacrament* which our Divine Redeemer endowed with grace; and hence as a dispensary of grace it is not at all to be despised.

2. It is like unto a *bath* wherein we cleanse ourselves from the stains of sin. Man is by nature passionately desirous to please, and would not like to appear in cultured society with soiled hands and a face smirched and disfigured. He is much more at ease if he can previously wash his hands and face. This he does at least once a day. But sin disfigures us more than any bodily blemish; and the eyes of God, of His angels and His saints are more keen-sighted than any human eye. Hence we must be ashamed to appear defiled by sin before the all-pure eyes of God, before His angels and saints. We must consequently be glad that we can in so easy a manner cleanse ourselves from so many stains in the bath of the sacrament of penance, and appear respectable before God, our Divine Redeemer and His saints.

3. A contrite confession brings *peace* and *rest* to the soul tortured by stings of conscience. After a good confession one feels satisfied and consoled. The fathers and theologians explain this happy feeling by what happens in natural corporeal life. As the terrible pains of an ulcer yield to relief and comfort when the ulcer has been opened, or the violent pain of poison or indigestion is relieved by the expulsion of the cause, thus the sinner acquires rest only when by a candid confession he is rid of his hidden sins. Therefore great sinners have, at times, of their own accord appeared in court and freely made known their crimes, only that they might find peace for their troubled hearts. The comparison which Mermillod, the famous bishop and cardinal, uses against scoffers at religion, is to the point. "Look," says he, "at the mighty boilers of ships and trains. If they were to explode, on account of the steam-pressure being too high, what destruction would not follow from it? But men, with their ingenuity, prevent that by the so-called safety ventilator and safety valve. The steam itself opens them when it exceeds the necessary pressure, and escapes. The danger is past; the passengers are safe. Such a safety valve is confession. When you are boiling and bubbling with excitement because of grievous sin, open the safety valve; relieve yourself from them by a candid confession, and your heart will obtain rest and peace." One day a workman, after a good confession, said to his father confessor:

"Not for a thousand dollars would I give up the peace I now enjoy." The same assurance we will get from many others who have made use of the safety valve of a good confession.

4. Confession is the most appropriate *satisfaction* we can make to God for the sins we have committed. For every sin contains two evils: pride and disobedience. Pride is atoned for by humility, which we practice in a good confession; disobedience is atoned for by submission to the judgment of God's representative. Therefore we see that among men also a frank admission of one's faults easily obtains pardon. Thus the child that has offended, appeases its angry father and aggrieved mother; thus the friend who has offended is reconciled to his friend. Thus, too, the frank confession of the criminal will have a mitigating influence when punishment is meted out to him. Therefore: "I said I will confess against myself my injustice to the Lord; and thou hast forgiven the wickedness of my sin." (Ps. 31, 5)

5. According to the doctrine of St. Paul, we can mitigate by a repentant confession the severe judgment of God: "But if we would judge ourselves, we should not be judged." (I Cor. 11, 31) The more repentant, the more candid, the more severe we are on ourselves in our accusation in confession, the more merciful will the just Judge be towards us. Is this not a precious advantage of confession?

6. By confession we are compelled to enter into ourselves; and in many respects conversion depends on this very fact, as in the case of the prodigal son. "And turning to himself he said . . . I will rise and go to my father." (Luke 15, 17 sq.) By entering into ourselves we become acquainted with our own sad condition; we find the causes and occasions of sin and are forced to contrition; as only a contrite confession will benefit us, we must think of the means for amendment, make resolutions, and avoid the occasions for sin. All these are elements which the sinner in his carelessness would forget if the duty of going to confession did not urge him to it, as experience but too often teaches us.

7. Confession urges us on to many good works which are necessary for our salvation, such as restitution of ill-gotten goods, adjustment of enmities, removal of scandal, avoidance of bad literature, sinful acquaintances, etc.

These and similar reasons have extorted from well-meaning Protestants magnificent testimony of the fitness, utility, and wisdom of confession as an institution. Frederick William III, king of Prussia, admits publicly: "No deeper wound could have been inflicted on the Evangelical Church than was done by this, that private confession was abolished, and general confession instituted in its place. This, to be sure, is more easy for both parties." (cf. *Evang.*

Kirchenzeitung, Nov. 3, 1894.) Hundreds of Anglican pastors petitioned the English parliament to reestablish confession (1868).

We have, therefore, every reason to thank our Divine Redeemer for having instituted confession; and to show our gratitude and that we appreciate it highly, we should love it tenderly and approach it willingly.

We distinguish the general confession, the review, and the ordinary confession which we make every eighth or fourteenth day. A general confession is necessary when, for some defect or other, the previous confessions have been invalid. It is advisable when there is a change in one's life, as in conversion from a lukewarm and careless to a cautious and fervent Christian life, or in devoting oneself to a spiritual calling, or on entering the state of matrimony. If troubled about your previous general confession, put to yourself three questions, and the favorable answers to them will make you feel satisfied. Ask yourself:

1. Had I the intention of making a good confession of my whole life? If you had, be satisfied.

2. Have I knowingly concealed what I thought should have been confessed? If you did not, be satisfied; the confesssion was good.

3. Was I at ease and satisfied during a short time at least immediately after my confession? If you were, be satisfied; the confession was good.

Should something of importance occur to you that you had forgotten, you can, to ease your mind, mention it in your next ordinary confession. Even if it is not advisable as a usual thing to make a general confession over again, a review during the spiritual exercises of one, two or more years since the last general confession is recommended. This review has many advantages. As it calls for a self-examination that covers a longer period than usual, of one or more years, it reveals the great number of our lapses from duty, and thus is apt to excite in us a deeper contrition. Our purpose of amendment should be all the greater, because one cannot but be deeply ashamed for having led such a careless life in the service of our infinitely good God. Such a confesssion draws down upon us a richer abundance of graces, because the abasement of self is so much greater; and God gives His grace to be humble. Love grows, because we see how much the Lord has forgiven and how readily He does so. Besides, this confession gives peace and comfort at the hour of death. For, if any of our ordinary confessions have been invalid through any deficiency, a careful repetition of them gives us ample security that the review, at least, is a valid confession.

Permit the addition of a few hints about what we can and must examine ourselves.

1. Let us go to confession eagerly and joyously, not with fear and trembling or from hard compulsion; but bearing in mind the great advantages which

confession offers, just because it is a sacrament of our holy Redeemer.

2. Let us pray to the Holy Ghost for light, because we are so blind in our spiritual life and in the knowledge of self; and do this more fervently the longer the space of time over which our confession is to extend.

3. Let us examine our conscience quietly and in an orderly manner; where we have failed in our duty to God, to our neighbor, to our superiors, to our subjects; how we have sinned in thought, word and deed; how we have failed through the capital sins, and by neglect of duty.

4. We must not forget contrition, which, if possible, should be perfect.

5. After we have made our act of contrition and a purpose of amendment, we enter the confessional. Our confession should be clear and distinct, short and concise, humble and repentant. The penitent should willingly submit to what the representative of Christ recommends and imposes. So much for the present.

We shall treat of the third part of this subject, Satisfaction, in the consideration of the third day, "The Spirit of Penance."

VI. MEDITATION: HELL

To strengthen ourselves still more in the conviction that grievous sin is the greatest evil we can

meet with, let us cast a glance into the frightful abyss into which mortal sin, when not forgiven, plunges the sinner. The sensual nature of man struggles against this meditation. But it is very useful; for the oftener we descend thither in thought during life, the more certainly we shall escape it after death. "Remember thy last end, and thou shalt never sin." (Eccl. 7, 40)

This meditation shows us clearly and distinctly how God judges mortal sin, and we must form our judgment according to His. It should fill us with a holy fear. "Pierce thou," says the Psalmist, "my flesh with thy fear, for I am afraid of thy judgment." (Ps. 118, 120) A time may come when love and fervor relax, temptations multiply, seductive occasions to sin become so enticing that only the fear of hell will keep us away from them. This meditation is also very important for priests, to awaken in them zeal for souls; for the more awful the lot of the sinner is in the world to come, the more will the true pastor labor to save the sheep entrusted to his care.

Let us go to the brink of the abyss of hell and look at the unfortunates who are suffering there, and we shall convince ourselves that Dives was right when he called hell a place of torments. (Luke 16, 28)

I

Looking at hell, what do we see?

a. *Darkness.* Although there is fire, it gives no light; for there is nothing in hell to give comfort. As in heaven we have but bliss, so in hell there is but pain, sadness and suffering. This want of light alone, which otherwise cheers the depressed human heart, is the cause of very oppressive suffering. Just think of one born blind; of a criminal who is condemned for life to a dark dungeon, into which no light ever enters. What does he see? Never a friendly face, never an expression of compassion, never a sympathetic look; and yet these are so acceptable, even in suffering.

b. What do we see there? The *refuse* of humanity, drunkards, robbers, murderers, criminals of all kinds. What society! How humiliating this detention, should the sinner happen to belong to the cultured, to polite society, perhaps even to the priesthood. He must forever be among fallen spirits, devils. "It is a fearful thing to fall into the hands of the living God." (Hebr. 10, 31) "Pierce thou my flesh with thy fear, for I am afraid of thy judgment." (Ps. 118, 120)

II

Let us apply the sense of *hearing.* What do we hear?

a. *Moaning,* groaning, whining. Represent to

yourself a battlefield full of wounded soldiers. How we are thrilled to the marrow by the sighs and moanings of the unfortunates, who are lying by the thousands in their blood, imploring help in their awful sufferings. Step into a hospital and hear the groans of the agonizing sick. Alas! these are but weak and faint pictures of hell!

b. What do we hear? Cries *for help;* but in vain! There is no one to hear them; no one to have pity on them. The God of infinite mercy during their earthly lives is now inexorable, is not to be moved for all eternity. Mary, the Mother of mercy, the angels and saints, the sinners' relatives and friends in heaven, hear them not. Imagine yourself in the condition of a tourist in the mountains perishing in the deep chasm of a glacier. There he lies helpless, with his limbs crushed. He cries for help, day and night, but for miles there is no ear to hear his call. In his misery he perishes. He is but a slight symbol of a reprobate.

c. What do we hear? Pathetic pleas for redemption, followed by beautiful promises if the pleas are heard. But there is only the disconsolate answer: *Too late!* too late! You had time enough and opportunities enough. I warned you, I called you, I invited you, and you did not listen. "I called, and you refused: I stretched out my hand, and there was none that regarded. You have despised all my counsel, and have neglected my reprehensions. I also will laugh in your destruction,

and will mock when that shall come to you which you fear. When sudden calamity shall fall on you, and destruction as a tempest shall be at hand, when tribulation and distress shall come on you! then shall they call upon me, and I will not hear; they shall rise in the morning, and shall not find me. Because they have hated instruction, and received not the fear of the Lord, nor consented to my counsel, but despised all my reproof." (Prov. 1, 24 ff.)

d. What do we hear? The severe words of the angry Judge: "Depart from me, ye cursed, into everlasting fire." (Matt. 25, 41) These words which thrust the sinners forever into the abyss are ever ringing in their ears.

e. What do we hear? No word of consolation, of sympathy, that allays even the most severe pain and drips into the most painful wounds like a soothing balsam.

f. What do we hear? The reproaches, the curses, the words of fruitless repentance. "We fools! . . . Behold how they [the Just] are numbered among the children of God, and their lot is among the saints! Therefore we have erred from the way of truth and of justice. . . . We wearied ourselves in the way of iniquity and destruction, and have walked through hard ways, but the way of the Lord we have not known. What hath pride profited us? or what advantage hath the boasting of riches brought us? All those things have passed away like a shadow." (Wis. 5, 4 sq.)

In truth, hell is a place of suffering, pain, and sadness. "Pierce thou my flesh with thy fear: for I am afraid of thy judgments." (Ps. 118, 120)

III

Let us now apply the sense of *smell.* We must call to mind that the pious prayers and good works of the just ascend to heaven "as an odor of sweetness" pleasing to God. But sin and the condemned sinner are objects of abomination, of horror, and aversion. The damned soul is aware that it is an object of hatred and aversion to God, and to such an extent that God, otherwise so kind, turns away from it with disgust and calls out: "Depart from me, you cursed, into everlasting fire." Oh how the curse of an angry mother, of an offended father, prays upon a degenerate child. Think of Cannan when Noe cursed him. (Gen. 9, 25) How that curse weighed upon the negro race. Think of the awful consequences of the curse which the infuriated Jews drew upon themselves when, in their madness, they cried out: "His blood be upon us and our children." (Matt. 22, 25) And yet for these people there is still time for grace and mercy. What effect then will the curse of the Almighty's anger have on the reprobate? (Gen. 8, 21; Eph. 5, 2; Phil. 4, 18, etc.) And all the angels and saints in heaven join in this curse, because it is just, as do all the condemned one's relatives and former friends, colleagues and pupils who are now in eternal bliss.

What an awful feeling it is to be accursed by God and His saints, by heaven and earth! No one would be able to endure the knowledge if he knew that he was an object of horror and aversion in a parish, in a city, in a whole country, on the whole earth. With what ignominy does not the reprobate appear to be loaded down who is oppressed by the curse of God, of heaven and of earth! He will be pressed down into the lowest abyss of hell. The reprobate will say to the mountains: "Fall upon us: and to the hills: cover us." (Luke 23, 30) "It is an awful thing to fall into the hands of the living God." Yes, hell is a place of suffering. "Pierce thou my flesh with thy fear, for I am afraid of thy judgment."

IV

Let us apply the sense of *taste.*

a. Call to mind that *hunger* and *thirst* so tortured the damned that the rich man asked for a drop of water to cool his tongue.

b. But bodily hunger and thirst are but a faint image of the hunger and thirst of the *soul* for peace, for the bliss and happiness for which it was created, for which it sighs and struggles with an irresistible longing. And this it can never attain, because it is always repulsed by God: "Depart from me, ye cursed!" Eternally without an end to attain, eternally hungering, eternally thirsting, eternally groping in darkness, eternally poor, eternally deserted,

eternally hated, eternally miserable, eternally without God!

c. Let us taste the *repentance* of the damned, fruitless because too late. "We have erred, we have deceived ourselves." Let our thoughts penetrate that lacerated conscience of theirs, all gnawed by remorse. Let us think of their well-grounded reproaches, "Through my fault, through my fault, through my most grievous fault" I came to this place of despair.

d. Let us not forget the *envy* and *jealousy* that consume them when they think of the blessed in heaven. Among them are parents, relatives, friends, companions, whom they formerly despised and ridiculed, but who remained faithful to God and are now enjoying heavenly bliss. The following words are also aimed at the damned: "Son, remember that thou didst receive good things in thy lifetime, and likewise Lazarus evil things; but now he is comforted, and thou art tormented." (Luke 16, 25) How bitter the lot of the damned! "Pierce thou my flesh with thy fear, for I am afraid of thy judgment."

V

Let us finally apply the sense of *touch*.

a. What do the damned feel? *Fire*. Among the greatest pains of sense is the one produced by fire. Therefore the rich man said: "I am tormented in this flame." (Luke 16, 24) "Which

of you can dwell with devouring fire? Which of you shall dwell with everlasting burnings?" (Is. 33, 14)

b. Let us think of the awful *weight* of eternity which presses the reprobate down. If they had but the faintest glimmer of hope of an end of their suffering, hell would be converted into purgatory. Relieved, consoled, the damned would breathe easier in the joyful expectation of the end; just as heaven, if even the least fear of its coming to an end were to arise, would be changed into a place of sadness and misfortune.

c. Not only is this suffering without end, without mitigation, without interruption, but it is also *without consolation.* Here on earth the most intense sufferings are softened by the thought that they will come to an end in a few days or a few months, and then all will be over; but in hell hundreds and thousands of years go by and hell begins anew. Here on earth there are friends who have compassion, and by kind words soothe the sufferer; in hell there is no sympathy, no compassion. Here I can console myself by looking up to heaven, which I merit by my sufferings, or by looking down to purgatory, which I can escape. In hell there is no such ground for consolation. The bitterest sufferings here on earth are made sweet by thinking of the Crucified who suffered so much for us; but in hell this recollection has no longer any effect. And so the sufferings of the damned are

without name, without end, without consolation. The words of the Psalmist become literally true: "The wicked shall see, and shall be angry; he shall gnash with his teeth, and shall pine away: the desire of the wicked shall perish." (Ps. 111, 10) Yes, the eyes of the sinner shall be opened, but too late; and he shall be angry and gnash his teeth, and pine away, but he cannot rise against the Almighty; and all his hopes and schemes will come to naught, fallen like a house of cards. "How awful a thing it is to fall into the hands of the living God." "Pierce thou my flesh with thy fear, for I am afraid of thy judgments."

From the fear of hell let us learn the grievousness of sin. Let us weep bitterly over the sins we have committed. Let us make a resolution to avoid grievous sin above all things. "Flee from sins as from the face of a serpent." (Eccl. 21, 2) "I have sworn and am determined to keep the judgments of thy justice." (Ps. 118, 106)

Before we leave hell, let us take a parting look at it. What do we see? *Fire.* Fire gives *light* and *heat,* and *hardens.* This effect the meditation on hell should have on us. By the light of hell-fire we *come to know* the grievousness of sin; for if God who is goodness itself, punishes sin so terribly, sin is indeed not a trifle to be played with. This fire shall *kindle* in me a heartfelt love and fervent gratitude to God: for to whom do I owe it that I am not now suffering there? Ah! I have sinned so

often, oftener than many a reprobate. I owe it all to the goodness and mercy of God. A man is grateful to the one who saved him from the danger of death; how much more grateful should I be to Him who saved me from eternal perdition. Thus the fire of hell which tortures the damned can kindle in me the fire of divine love. Fire *hardens.* Thus the remembrance of the fire of hell, which I have deserved so often, shall harden my endurance that I may patiently, in the spirit of penance carry the little crosses which the Lord has laid upon me to atone for my sins already forgiven.

So we shall leave the meditation on hell with this rich gain: enlightened, enkindled with the love of gratitude, steeled in the spirit of penance for the sins we have committed.

THIRD DAY

THE RETURN TO GOD

"I will arise, and will go to my father." (Luke 15, 18)

VII. MEDITATION: DEATH

We have come to the knowledge of our destiny, and we have seen how often we have gone astray. Let us now endeavor to bring our lives back to the right road. The cause of our many deviations was the high opinion we had of earthly goods. Too easily we allowed ourself to be blinded, misled and corrupted by them, and to become unfaithful in the service of God. It will, therefore, be well for us to become convinced of their perishableness, vanity, and nothingness. Then our heart will not become too much attached to them, but rather withdrawn from them, so that we can more easily think of and yearn for eternal things. For this purpose the meditation on death is most useful. It will also admonish us to be zealous in the service of God. For it shows us how, in that important hour, only those things which we have done for God will console us and make us happy, as they alone can go along with us into the hereafter.

Let us approach the bed-side of a dying person,

who calls out to us: "To-day for me; to-morrow for you." And let us pray to the Lord to open our eyes to our salvation, as the hour of death will open them. "Turn away my eyes, that they may not behold vanity." (Ps. 118, 37)

The Lord often compares death with a *thief*. And rightly so, for there is a striking similarity between death and a thief.

I

1. The thief steals, and so does death. Only death is a thief of a peculiar kind. It is more frightful in that which it does not take than in that which it does take. It takes the *temporal* goods, and leaves the *grave,* decomposition, dust. It takes the *body,* and leaves the *soul* all alone before the tribunal of God. It takes away *time,* so precious, and leaves an *eternity* without end.

a. Death takes *everything* without exception: temporal goods, honors, earthly pleasures. "For we brought nothing into this world, and certainly we can carry nothing out." (I Tim. 6, 7)

b. It takes it *without doubt.* By precaution we can get away from an ordinary thief, but not from death. "It is appointed unto men once to die." (Heb. 9, 27)

c. It takes it *by force.* No resistance will avail; no money will save the rich, no science the learned, and no army the powerful.

d. It takes it *with pain.* The separation is the

more painful the more one clings to the things of earth and finds all happiness in them. How much more painful it is to pull the skin off a person than to pull off his clothes. "Doth bitter death separate in this manner?" (I Kings 15, 32)

It leaves a narrow grave, decay, dust, decomposition, and after a little while — *oblivion!*

2. Death takes the *body,* which was so carefully pampered, for which so much was done, and for the sake of which the soul was so much neglected. It leaves the soul alone and helpless, with only its deeds —"Their works follow them" (Apoc. 14, 13),— before God, the Creator, Reedeemer, Judge, who now calls to account (Luke 16, 2), who knows all, whom one should have served, but did not. What a meeting!

3. Death takes away *time,* every moment of which is precious, because every moment one can merit a new crown for heaven. It takes away time, for which the saints in heaven and the souls in purgatory would envy us if they were capable of envy. How they would make use of it, the former to increase their bliss, the latter to diminish the pains of purgatory. Death takes away our time for which the damned envy us, for they, too, would use it to escape the flames of hell! In vain will the dying man beg for a year, a month, an hour; it will not be given him. Instead, eternity without end succeeds it, in which nothing can be done for one's salvation.

II

Death is like a thief in its *approach;* for we do not know *when* it is going to come. As a thief fixes upon an hour in which we least expect him, so "the son of man will come at what hour you know not." (Matt. 24, 44) To many a one that will happen which happened to the rich man who, as our Divine Redeemer relates (Luke 12, 16), at the view of the yield of his fields, forgetting death entirely, said to his soul: "Soul, thou hast much goods laid up for many years; take thy rest, eat, drink, make good cheer." But God said unto him: "Thou fool, this night do they require thy soul of thee; and whose shall those things be which thou hast provided?" Does it not sometimes happen that a person falls sick, prepares himself for death, and it does not come? A person takes sick again, does not mind it, and lo! he dies. Indeed, the words of our Divine Redeemer are verified: "The Son of man will come at that hour you know not."

Death is worse than a thief. We can keep the thief away by precaution and watchfulness, but we cannot escape death; it is sure to come. No human prudence will avail. A year, a month, a day, an hour will come when they will say: He is dead. In Genesis (chap. 5) is the account of the great age of the patriarchs, some of whom lived many hundreds of years. But then it is usually said, "and he died." So it will one day be said of you: "He died." It is true, we do not know when.

Perhaps it will be in twenty years, perhaps in ten years, or five, or one year, or perhaps even within this year. We do not know. "You know not when the lord of the house cometh: at even, or at midnight, or at cock crowing, or in the morning." (Mark 13, 35)

III

Death has a third likeness to a thief. We do not know in what *circumstances* it will strike us, whether at home or away from home in a foreign country; whether prepared or unprepared, after receiving the last sacraments, or without them, whether after a long sickness or suddenly. And here take notice that sudden death is not an unusual end for priests, as we read so often in the papers. They die suddenly in the pulpit, in the confessional, at the altar, in bed at night. The practical lesson of these facts is that we should willingly take to heart what the Lord said when He made use of this comparison: "Watch" (Mark 13, 35, 37); "Be prepared." (Luke 12, 40)

Let us now draw some wholesome resolutions from this meditation:

1. We should be *convinced* that "We have not here a lasting city," for death robs us of it, but "seek one that is to come." (Heb. 13, 14) We are destined for heaven to which we must steer our course, and therefore we are called pilgrims here on earth. (Heb. 11, 13)

2. We should take to *heart* the warning: "Lay not to yourselves treasures on earth, where the rust and moth consume, and where thieves break through and steal; but lay up to yourselves treasures in heaven." (Matt. 6, 19)

3. But since we must think of earthly things and have care of them, "Let us so take care of temporal things, that we do not thereby lose the things eternal," as the Church so beautifully prays on the third Sunday after Pentecost.

4. Death cuts off all further time and opportunities for working out our salvation. The Lord comes and demands an account of all the graces and means He has bestowed upon us during the course of years. "Give an account," He says, "of thy stewardship." (Luke 16, 2) Yes, death, like a thief, often overtakes us unawares, when we least look for it, and yet from the account which we must then unexpectedly give, the entire eternity of heaven or hell depends. Let us therefore be prepared to appear before the tribunal of our Creator. We must clean up the past by obtaining in a repentant confesssion the remission of all our grievous sins; we must show our hands full of good works to obtain the reward of a faithful servant. Otherwise the sad lot of those of whom the Psalmist writes may befall us: "They have slept their sleep: and all the men of riches have found nothing in their hands." (Ps. 75, 6) Who are these men of riches? Christians, who are so rich in graces and opportunities

to gather for themselves treasures for heaven. But so many while away their time, neglect or trifle away numberless graces, live carelessly and recklessly; and when they awake on their death-bed to hear the cry, "Behold the bridegroom cometh; go ye forth to meet him," they have no oil in their lamps. They will be excluded from the kingdom of heaven and hear the dread words: "I know you not." (Matt. 25, 5)

5. "Whilst we have time let us work good." (Gal. 6, 10.) "Defraud not thyself of the good day, and let not the part of a good gift overpass thee." (Eccl. 14, 14) Therefore spend your days in such a manner that you can say every evening what our Divine Redeemer said on the evening of His earthly life: "I have finished the work which thou gavest me to do." (John 17, 4) Then we can hope to hear the consoling words of the divine Judge: "Well done, good and faithful servant, . . . enter thou into the joy of thy Lord." (Matt. 25, 23)

"Holy Mary, Mother of God, pray for us sinners now and at the hour of our death. Amen."

VIII. MEDITATION: THE PARABLE OF THE TALENTS

(Matt. 25, 14–30)

In St. Matthew's gospel our Lord relates a parable designed to rouse us from our sleep of sloth and in-

difference and to spur us on to a renewal of our spiritual life. As this gospel is read so often at holy Mass, on nearly all the feasts of confessors who were bishops, we can, during the year, easily call to mind the good resolutions we have made during the spiritual exercises. It is the parable of the lord who distributed talents among his servants. To one he gave five, to another three, to a third only one; and he charged them all: "Trade till I come." (Luke 19, 13) On his return he demanded an account of the talents assigned. The two servants who doubled the money were richly rewarded; the third, who returned the talents entrusted to him without gain was punished. Let us consider the *distribution* of the talents, the *return* of the landlord, the *account* he demanded from his servants.

I. Distribution of the Talents

The lord is no other than God himself. With respect to Him we must consider ourselves as servants. As He is essentially Lord, so we are essentially servants; to serve is our destiny, our task, our charge. Everywhere, at all times, under all circumstances we are servants, and must serve. All we have comes from God, is a talent lent us, and must therefore be made use of in His service and for His honor. He has not given us anything to no purpose. Nothing in us must lie fallow. "All things serve thee." But God has distributed His gifts unequally in the order of nature as well as in the

order of grace. To one He gives more, to another less. We must not on that account be dissatisfied, nor let envy or jealousy steal upon us. Should we feel uneasy about it, we must bear in mind that God is absolute master of His gifts, and it is presumptuous on the part of His servants or creatures to murmur and complain. "Take what is thine, and go thy way," the Lord will say. "Or is it not lawful for me to do what I will?" (Matt. 20, 14) And the more so can the Lord bestow His gifts at will since our merits do not give us the least claim to them. To silence every complaint, let us bear in mind that the Lord has generously preferred us to many thousands who have in every respect received less than we have. Moreover, let us reflect that with less talents, in a less influential state and calling, in a smaller and poorer parish, we can serve God as perfectly, attain as high a degree of sanctity, and gain as much merit as he who has received five talents, reached the highest dignity, and is in charge of the most respectable parish. For every one can, in every state and calling, be a good, faithful, and perfect servant of God. This we see from the parable: For the servant who had received two talents merited the same praise and the same reward as the one to whom five talents had been allotted. Hence we should submit to the paternal directions of God, and be faithful and zealous in carrying out the expressed will of our Lord: "Trade until I come."

Perhaps we should like to know whether we belong to those who had received but one or two talents, or whether we dare flatter ourselves with having obtained five. We can with full right count ourselves among those whom God has entrusted with five talents. Which are they? Different groups might be devised; we propose the following one, but with the remark that each single talent contains in itself many others.

First Talent: our *natural* endowments, by which we were enabled to prepare ourselves for our high calling. The greater they are, the more use we can make of them, with the grace of God, for His honor. Thus we may use a keen understanding, a good memory, a capacity for languages or the sciences.

Second Talent: the *call* to the priesthood. With this very many graces are bound up, such as protection from dangers and temptations; education in a seminary, and perhaps, if the call be early, in the preparatory school and college; hence the direction to a spiritual life beginning from boyhood.

Third Talent: the *priestly* dignity. This includes many grand privileges, as the power to say Mass, and thus to open the flood-gates of grace, the power to forgive sins, and, in general, to administer the sacraments.

Fourth Talent: the *offices* we hold. As pastors, teachers, confessors, trustees, etc., we can do and promote much good, extend the kingdom of God, and advance the interests of the Sacred Heart.

Fifth Talent: time. With this we are enabled to work every day, every hour for the glory of God, and to gain merits for eternity.

These are fertile and fruitful talents, of which He said: "Trade till I come." We must not allow any of them to lie fallow.

II. The Return of the Landlord

"Now after a long time the lord came." The Lord has indeed granted us much time — twenty, thirty, perhaps more years. Yet even if He waits a long time, He will come.

a. His coming is *certain;* we cannot escape it. It may be sudden, at a time which we cannot even guess; for the Lord compares his coming to that of a thief, who makes every effort to come unexpectedly and unnoticed.

b. This coming is *weighty* in its consequences. With it our earthly trial comes to an end; the time to be converted, to do penance, to put the soul in order, is over, the time replete with graces finds the final settlement. In vain will those who have not made good use of the time for work cry out: "Give us of your oil, for our lamps are gone out." (Matt. 25, 8) It is all of no avail: "The door was shut." Now it means: "Give an account of thy stewardship." (Luke 16, 2) This makes the return of the Lord hard.

III. The Account to be Given

Let us consider this account somewhat more closely. It is *comprehensive, strict, decisive* for all eternity.

a. It is *comprehensive.* It extends to all the talents which we have enumerated, and others; it examines the whole time, the years and days, for which they were entrusted to us; it weighs every word and deed, all we have done or should have done during our whole earthly career.

b. From this we see the *severity of this account.* It takes notice even of the smallest things, includes even idle and useless words. We can measure the severity of the account to be given especially from this, that the servant who had not squandered his talent, not lost or misused it, but had simply let it lie useless, was found guilty and punished. How severe, then, will the judgment be on us who have made no use of so many graces and opportunities for doing good, but have squandered and abused them. This account will be simply frightful, because it will decide our reward or punishment, and, in truth, an immeasurable reward and a terrible punishment; and that decision will be eternal. Terrible are the words: "The unprofitable servant cast ye out into exterior darkness. There shall be weeping and gnashing of teeth." Still more terrible sounds the sentence: "Depart from me, ye cursed, into everlasting fire." (Matt. 25, 41)

There is no recourse to a higher court, no excuse, or intercession; all is lost beyond redemption. Here on earth there are many means of escaping from the decisions of a court; flight, recourse to higher powers, intercession, pardon or bribery. None of these will there be of any avail. How consoling, on the other hand, are the words which the faithful servant will hear: "Well done, good and faithful servant, . . . enter into the joy of thy Lord." How glad will he be to have served his Lord faithfully! How he will rejoice in the greater exertions and the sacrifices he made. If anything could affect him painfully, it would be that he had done too little and had not been more faithful in serving his God. Let us ever bear in mind when reading this parable, the "Trade till I come," and ever be mindful of the coming of the Lord and the account which must surely be given. May this warning prompt us to make every effort that we may one day hear the words so full of joy: "Enter thou into the joy of thy Lord."

SPIRITUAL READING

Our Divine Redeemer recommends watchfulness to Peter and the other apostles, lest they fall into temptation. This watchfulness we, too, must practice, especially in examining our conscience. This care of our conscience may well be compared to the *police-force* of a well-ordered city, which

ferrets out the crimes for punishment and checks wrong-doing. So by self-examination we prevent sin; and if in spite of all precautions, a sin is committed, all will soon be brought back into good order. This is an efficacious means to foster and promote the spiritual life and the striving for perfection, and well worth our closest attention during the spiritual exercises. Let us examine ourselves with regard to it, so that in future we may make use of all its adavantages.

I. General Examen

To make our examination well, let us consider the following points:

1. We premise the examination by a short prayer of *thanksgiving* for the favors we have received during the day and during life. This is done, partly to comply with the duty of gratitude which we owe to God for the favors He showers down upon us every day, partly to dispose ourselves the better for the contrition which should come later when we recall our many faults and sins. For what a contrast presents itself to us: God so good to us, and we unfaithful to Him.

2. We next pray for *light* from above. We are blind in our knowledge of ourselves, owing to the fact that our self-love is too great. The more the Holy Spirit enlightens us, the more keenly shall we notice our sins and imperfections, just as the brighter the sun shines the more easily we notice the

dust on the furniture and even in the air which we had considered pure.

3. Then we go over the whole or half of the day, according as we examine our conscience once or twice a day. We *examine* how and wherein we have failed; and to obtain an easier survey it is advisable to follow a definite order. Either we review the order of the day, or examine our conduct with regard to God, to our neighbor and ourselves, and how we have performed the duties of our calling. We need not enter upon a close and subtle scrutiny of various temptations. We only lose time by doing so, and get no certain knowledge, but press the phantasms deeper into our soul so that they may return more easily on every occasion and disturb us. If our conscience does not see a fault definitely, pass it over; and if our faults are the usual ones, make a general act of contrition.

4. Then finish the examination by making an act of heartfelt contrition, together with the resolution to avoid these faults of which we are conscious.

II. Particular Examen

We must distinguish the *particular* examen from the *general* examination of conscience. The former has for its object to root out some special and definite capital fault. Every one has a more or less *characteristic* fault into which he falls more frequently than into others; it is more noticed by his companions than his other faults; it is the root of

many other faults, and if it be eradicated, the faults which sprang from it will cease. A man's capital fault may be compared to the capital of an enemy's country, which is the key to the entrance into a region, the point of stratagem for an experienced general's attack in time of war. If he captures the capital, he easily gains mastery over the rest of the country. Thus a person will make great progress in perfection if he attacks and overcomes his capital faults. He digs out the fertile roots of many other faults. If we have succeeded in doing away with our more noticable faults, we can change our particular examen and aim at cultivating the more necessary virtues.

In this examination the following order must be strictly carried out. After we have fixed our eyes on some definite fault, we must begin our day's work by making a resolution carefully to avoid that fault. As soon and as often as we become aware of having failed against our resolve, we must make an act of contrition, and when possible, show it by an outward act; as by striking our breast, saying: "My Jesus, mercy." Then we must renew the resolution. When the time for examination comes, we note down the number of faults committed, and then compare day with day, week with week, in order to see the progress we have made in battling with the fault. Contrition and a renewed resolution close this examination of conscience, which may be attached as a supplement or expansion to the gen-

eral examination of conscience. That we may succeed the better in keeping our characteristic fault under control it is advisable to direct our daily meditation, our holy Communions and other spiritual exercises to this point, thus to strengthen our efforts. By the attentive use of the means we shall gradually mend our ways with regard to the more radical faults, and plant the most beautiful virtues in the garden of our heart, thereby reaching the basic virtues and great purity of soul.

III. CONSIDERATION: THE SPIRIT OF PENANCE

To obtain remission of sins and reconciliation with God, three acts are necessary: contrition, confession, and penance. We have already spoken of the first two and now something remains to be said about the *Spirit of Penance,* which must accompany us through our whole life. We must consider how necessary it is, and how we can fittingly practice and cultivate it.

I. The Necessity of the Spirit of Penance

a. This necessity follows from the gravity of sin. We have seen this in the preceding meditation. Even if God in His goodness has forgiven us all our sins, true contrition will urge us to do all we can to make reparation. This we see even among men. The more sorry one is for having offended a friend

the greater will be his efforts to repair the wrong he has done. St. Augustine says beautifully: "Sin must not remain unpunished; it is not becoming, it is not good, it is not right. Then, as sin must be punished, punish it yourself, that you may not be punished for it." Let us punish it ourselves for we will not hurt ourselves, rather than be punished by God whose punishments hurt. Bear in mind purgatory.

b. For this reason the saints led lives of such severe penance. If we study their lives, we shall not find one whose penitential works do not frighten our effeminate nature.

c. In the first centuries in which the faith of Christians was still lively and their fervor energetic, Mother Church, entirely penetrated with the grievousness of sin, imposed long, severe, and painful penances for mortal offences. The penitent had to wait, often for years, and take upon himself fasting and mortifications of all kinds before full remission was granted him. An offence committed by one who had already been baptized was not looked upon as an inconsiderable trifle, but as a crime which called for a condign expiation.

d. And in truth, if we do not cultivate the spirit of penance and do not think of atonement, God Himself will see to it that the neglected satisfaction is given, either in this life by temporal punishment, or hereafter in purgatory. Therefore St. Augustine warns us, as we have heard already, rather to punish

ourselves now than to wait till God punishes us hereafter.

e. The spirit of penance is necessary to protect ourselves from a relapse. As we have sufficient experience in our weakness, we can not protect ourselves too well by the bulwark of mortification and severity. By this we bridle our passions, deny many things to our senses, and thus cut off the occasions of sin. All this calls for the spirit of penance. Hence the Council of Trent teaches that the whole life of a Christian must be a constant penance.

II. The Practice of the Spirit of Penance

We have seen how necessary the spirit of penance is. But sensual nature shrinks from penance, sacrifices, and mortification. We bring all kinds of pretexts to free ourselves from it. To make penance somewhat easier, a few remarks will be useful. We distinguish a twofold penance: a passive penance by which we endure, and an active penance which we impose upon ourselves.

1. *Passive Penance*

This consists in patiently putting up with whatever is unpleasant, hard and bitter, as we meet with it during the day. God in His goodness takes all that as an expiation, as a penance for our sins, if we do but take these things from His hands and bear them patiently. What a wide field of penance opens

up for us here! How many disagreeable things we meet with,— sickness, pain, temptations, despondency, scruples, difficulties from the weather, from our neighbors with whom we must associate, from our superiors who have not always reasonable consideration for a subject, from the duties of our calling, from our work. How often do we find obedience, the daily order, and community life hard? How often do we not experience ingratitude, being slighted, nay even calumniated, etc.? If we but keep our eyes open, we shall find crosses enough every day.

This passive penance has grades, and can always be practiced more perfectly. It is useful to carry these little crosses patiently, without complaint; still better, to bear them willingly and submissively, being aware of our faults; yet more perfect, to take them cheerfully upon ourselves even with a longing for more and severer sufferings, in the consciousness that we have deserved still more. Then we say from our hearts the words attributed to St. Augustine: "Burn me or cut me here, but spare me in eternity."

We should practice this kind of penance all the more willingly because it has advantages which do not belong to the private penance we impose on ourselves.

a. We can practice this every day, every hour. Not so active penance; we cannot always fast nor always be taking the discipline.

b. Passive penance does not injure our health; the most delicate person can practice it. Active penance, on the other hand, when imprudently administered, may be detrimental to our health.

c. Hence to practice passive penance, to carry our little crosses patiently, we need no permission. On the other hand, we should not impose upon ourselves special penances without consulting our spiritual director and obtaining his consent.

d. In the practice of active penance self-will, self-complacency and vanity often creep in and diminish the merit not a little. This is not the case in the practice of passive penance.

e. Passive penance is coupled with other virtues. To practice it well we need faith, which sees the hand of God in all things; we need patience, obedience and charity. This does not so clearly obtain in the practice of active penance. Therefore we should prudently give ourselves to the practice of passive penance, making a virtue of necessity, for from most of the little crosses we cannot escape.

2. *Active Penance*

A few remarks about active penance, which we must not neglect, even if we practice passive penance most assiduously. We are not here speaking of the practice of any extraordinary penance. Before undertaking any unusual mode of penance one should obtain the advice of his spiritual director. We shall speak only of a few penitential practices

which are in common use and which can be undertaken easily by any one. They have many beneficial effects.

a. The psalmist records an advantageous practice of penance when he tells us: "By what doth the young man *correct* his ways? By observing thy words" (Ps. 118, 9), that is God's commandments. This implies a change and amendment of life. Such was the penance which Zacheus when converted imposed upon himself. "And if I have defrauded anyone I give him back fourfold." Have I sinned by disobedience? A good penance is obedience. Have I sinned through pride? A good penance is humility. Was I slothful in doing good? Zeal is an excellent penance.

b. An excellent practice of penance is *obedience.* By obedience that will is sacrificed which rebelled against God. By sacrifice the offended party receives satisfaction and atonement. A sacrifice is the more precious, the more valuable the offering is. But as our free will is most valuable to us, when I give this as a sacrifice to God, I give Him a most agreeable satisfaction.

c. We can practice penance by *mortifying* our eyes, our ears, our tongue, in fact all our senses. This practice is salutary and well worth recommending. By it we prevent many sins; we can practice it everywhere; we can sanctify our senses; we can punish those very organs by whose abuse we have

offended God, and make them instruments of justice unto sanctification, according to the exhortation of St. Paul: "For as you have yielded your members to serve uncleanliness and iniquity unto iniquity; so now yield your members to serve justice unto sanctification." (Rom. 6, 19)

Among mortifications, these are especially pleasing to God which we call "*firstlings.*" As we know from the Old Testament, God especially reserved the firstlings for Himself. So it is pleasing to God when we offer to Him, as the first new fruits, the first moments of gratification, as in seeing a beautiful sight, or in satisfying our curiosity when we receive an eagerly expected letter or newspaper.

Since we are in duty bound to God to do penance, and as He is satisfied with but little, provided it comes from the heart; since, too, we have so many opportunities, if we be but a little attentive, to practice passive and active penance, let us in this holy solitude awaken in ourselves the spirit of penance. With this spirit may our future life become, according to the admonition of the Council of Trent, a life of penance, that we follow, at least at a distance, in the footsteps of the saints, who were all distinguished by the spirit of penance.

IX. MEDITATION: THE FALL AND REPENTANCE OF PETER

As a conclusion of the meditations made thus far let us hold up before our eyes a picture from which, as from an image, we can learn the reasons why we strayed so often from the road of righteousness and what we must do now to bring our lives back to the way of salvation. This event is the fall of the Apostle Peter with his subsequent conversion. In two points we are going to follow that disciple step by step on his way to sin and on his return to the Lord.

I. The Fall of Peter

We shall consider the serious truth that even an Apostle can fall, that pillars of the Church can shake, therefore we must not lead careless lives. Nothing gives security or protects us infallibly from falling. Not our *age;* Peter was perhaps the oldest among the Apostles. Not our *calling;* Peter was directly chosen by Christ to the apostleship. Not our *preferment* from God; Peter had graces and preferments over the other Apostles, for he was designated as the first vicar of Christ. Not the *good education* which one has received; Peter had already spent three years in the school of Christ. Not *confidential* intercourse with Christ; Peter had enjoyed this

in a special manner. And yet he fell. If Apostles fell, I too can fall. One, Judas, fell, and never rose again. Therefore, "with fear and trembling work out your salvation." (Phil. 2, 12)

But this fear must not make us lose courage or become despondent, and despair, but it must be salutary; hence:

a. It must produce diffidence in our own strength.

b. It must urge us to vigilance, caution and prudence: "Watch."

c. It must admonish us to prayer and fervor: "Brethren, labor the more that by good works you may make sure your calling and election." (II Pet. 1, 10)

d. This fear should urge us to have recourse to God and to place our confidence in Him: "For it is God who worketh in you, both to will and to accomplish, according to His good will." (Phil. 2, 13) "Because He, who hath begun the good work in you, will perfect it." (Phil. 1, 6) But "I can do all things in Him who strengtheneth me." (Phil. 4, 13) Therefore with complete distrust in ourselves let us take courage and trust in God!

But how did it happen that Peter fell? From a close examination of what the Gospels tell us about it, we can distinguish five steps which gradually led to his fall.

First Step: Neglect of prayer. The Lord had recommended prayer, "Watch ye and pray that ye

enter not into temptation." (Matt. 26, 41) We are weak, our vocation is exalted, we are exposed to many dangers, the evil spirit is ever watchful. "Behold Satan hath desired to have you, that he may sift you as wheat." (Luke 22, 31) We must hold on to a strong One, be attached to God and lean upon Him, and thus be strengthened by Him in order to resist and not succumb. This is done by prayer. Here we find the first reason for the fall of so many priests. They neglect the life of prayer which they learnt and cultivated in the seminary. At first prayers which are not strictly obligatory are neglected. This negligence increases. Then they neglect obligatory prayers and become weaker until they succumb to temptation. St. Charles Borromeo expressed this beautifully. He intrusted a neglected parish to a young zealous priest who plunged without restraint into the cares of the ministry. And as all his efforts were for others, he neglected his spiritual exercises, and then himself. Instead of bringing others back to the right path, he himself was torn away by the general immorality, and instead of aiding the welfare of the parish, he scandalized its members. The holy Bishop, having been informed of the sad state of affairs and the cause that brought it about, said to the pastor, in the words of the Psalmist: "My heart is withered, because I forgot to eat my bread." (Ps. 101, 5) He admonished him to resume his spiritual exercises. The priest received the admonition willingly, and fol-

lowed it. Strengthened by prayer, his labors in this parish were from this on full of blessings.

Second Step: Our Divine Redeemer not only recommended prayer, but also watchfulness. "Watch ye." If the priest wishes not to fall, he must be watchful. He must watch over his eyes. The prophet Jeremiah accentuates this, saying: "Death is come up through our windows." (Jer. 9, 21) David experienced this (II Kings 11, 2), and so did many others. He must watch over his ears, over his imagination, over his heart, which so easily gives itself to flattering creatures. This watchfulness Peter neglected.

Third Step: Peter overestimated himself; he built too much upon himself and his good resolutions. The Lord earnestly warned him: "Amen I say to thee, to-day, even in this night, before the cock crow twice, thou shalt deny me thrice." But Peter, instead of believing the Lord, and being afraid because of the positive prediction of his infinitely wise Redeemer, instead of turning to Him and praying Him to ward off the danger, does not humble himself, but contradicts the Lord and prefers himself to his brethren. "Although all shall be scandalized in Thee, yet not I." This self-confidence the Lord desires to disgrace, and so permits Peter's fall.

Fourth Step: This step is indicated by the words: "But Peter followed him afar off." When fervor abates and sloth enters the heart of a priest, the fall

is not far off. This sloth enters when the warning of our Divine Redeemer gradually vanishes from the memory; when this example no longer stands vividly before our eyes, but recedes into the background. For what we see only from a distance and in faint outlines, make no impression. When we withdraw from the impressions and influence of our Divine Redeemer, the world with its allurements will soon obtain the upper hand, and draw into its net the soul estranged from Christ.

Fifth Step: Peter courts *danger.* He sits down in the midst of the enemies of Christ. That is not the place for a disciple of the Lord. "He that loveth danger shall perish in it." (Eccl. 3, 27) "He that touches pitch shall be defiled with it." (Eccl. 13, 1) Temptation beguiles him, human respect seizes him; and before he takes precaution, he has denied his Lord and Master. This is what usually happens when we go into bad and dangerous company. Others begin immodest conversations, or talk against our holy faith; we are afraid to contradict them lest we pass as clericals or narrow-minded bigots. We laugh; and when asked our opinion, we agree with them against our own better conviction, we fail and fall. Still more dangerous is too free and confidential intercourse with young persons of the other sex. Whoever loves danger will surely fall.

Let us consider a few of the circumstances surrounding the fall of the Apostle. The temptation,

the occasion of the fall, came from a direction of which he never even suspected. Not from furious troopers, not from a person of high rank that would have struck him with terror, but from a poor servant girl. We also notice a gradation in the sin of the Apostle, at first a simple denial, then a denial with an oath, and finally he adds execrations to his oaths. Thus if the sinner does not at once resist temptations and occasions of sin, he will fall ever lower and lower.

II. The Conversion of St. Peter

We have followed the fall of Peter with sadness, and we have seen that in a similar way we ourselves have several times strayed from the right path. We shall now accompany him on his conversion and return to his dear Redeemer. If we weigh accurately all that the Gospels say about it, we can bring *five points* into prominence.

1. The conversion begins with a *look of grace* from our Divine Redeemer. "The Lord, turning, looked on Peter." (Luke 22, 61) This look, like a streak of lightning, struck the unfaithful Apostle, showed him the depth of his fall, and lit up the abyss of ingratitude into which he had so carelessly plunged. All our preceding meditations have been so many looks of grace which our Divine Redeemer has directed towards us to enlighten us on the many aberrations of our past life. May they have the effect on us which they had on Peter.

2. "And Peter remembered the words of the Lord." Peter now received a light. He recalled the unfathomable love of the Divine Heart which he had so deeply saddened, the promises which he had so basely broken in his ingratitude, his unfaithfulness towards his Lord. Let us during these days of spiritual recollection reflect on the mission we have as men, as Christians, as priests, which we so easily forget; let us recall the many resolutions and promises to which we were unfaithful; let us reflect on so many aberrations, on so much ingratitude, of which we have become guilty; and pondering the sad state of our conscience in which we have been living, let us dispose ourselves to return to our Father's house.

3. In consequence of this look of grace from the Lord and the recollection it aroused, Peter felt himself entirely crushed. But owing to the ineffable goodness of the Divine Heart, Peter rose quickly. The first thing he did was *to quit* the place of danger and of sin, "He went without." If we wish to be reconciled to God, it is absolutely necessary to break off all connections with sin and to avoid the occasions.

4. And now he gave himself up to a heartfelt *contrition*. "He wept bitterly." Mindful of the infinite goodness of the Sacred Heart, which he had so bitterly grieved, Peter's heart prompted him to shed tears over his sins. But his contrition was equalled by his humility and confidence; he hopes

for forgiveness. Mark the difference between *Peter's contrition* and *Judas' contrition.* Judas, too, was sorry for betraying the Lord, but, absorbed by the greatness of his sin, he forgets the goodness of the Sacred Heart, becomes despondent, loses heart, despairs, and adding sin to sin, ends his life by suicide. Repentance which locks the heart and takes away courage and confidence is a *Judas-repentance,* and finds no forgiveness. Peter's was not such. At the thought that our sins are indeed great, but that the goodness of the Sacred Heart is still greater, the heart expands, takes courage, has recourse to this Heart, is received, forgiven and reconciled. *Peter-repentance* is one which weeps bitterly over sins,—"He wept bitterly,"— but has recourse to Jesus. The following circumstance shows that Peter did not lose confidence in the goodness of Jesus. As soon as he learned that the Lord had risen, he hastened to the grave before all others, save John, undoubtedly to throw himself at the feet of his beloved Lord and ask forgiveness. Had he lost heart, he would have hid and concealed himself; he would not have dared to face Christ.

5. But Peter is not content with mere repentance. By his *zeal for souls* he repairs his fault. Our Divine Savior Himself pressed this reparation upon him, for when Peter protested that he loved Him, He said: "If you love me, feed my sheep." He seemed to say: If you are in earnest, feed my lambs, and show your affection by your loving care

for my lambs and for my sheep, which I bought with my blood. (John 21, 15) Then Peter began a life of zeal for souls, and brought back numberless sinners to the Lord. A grand atonement for sins is the saving of souls. In this zeal for souls he persevered for years, to the end of his life, and sealed his repentance with his blood. If we have sinned like Peter, like Peter let us repent and return to the Divine Heart.

Before we leave this meditation, let us recall the reception Jesus gave to Peter. That will give us courage and inspire us with confidence. Even if we have sinned ever so much, during these days we are going to return to His Heart. Our Divine Redeemer did not forget Peter: He looked at Peter. It was a sorrowful look, without the reproach which he well deserved. And after His resurrection He appeared to him before He appeared to the other apostles (I Cor. 15, 5), considered him still as His disciple, even confirmed him in the dignity promised him before, and actually appointed him as His representative and chief pastor of His entire flock upon earth. Who should be afraid to repent and fall at the feet of the Redeemer to obtain forgiveness of all his sins?

FOURTH DAY

FOLLOWING CHRIST

"I will follow thee whithersoever thou shalt go." (Matt. 8, 19)

"Let this mind be in you which was also in Christ Jesus." (Phil. 2, 5)

"And be renewed in the spirit of your mind, and put on the new man, who according to God is created in justice and in holiness of truth." (Eph. 4, 23–24)

X. MEDITATION: THE KINGDOM OF CHRIST

We are now animated by the desire to renew our life according to the will of God: "I have sworn and am determined to keep the judgment of thy justice." (Ps. 118, 106) But we wish to see a model which we can imitate. This wish our heavenly Father anticipates by sending His much-beloved Son into the world, not only to redeem us by His suffering and death, not only to show us the right road to heaven, but also to lead us by His example. To Him in a higher sense we can apply the words which God spoke to Moses when He showed him the plan according to which the tabernacle and its furniture were to be constructed: "Look, and make it according to the pattern that

was shown thee in the mount." (Exod. 25, 40) The example of our Divine Redeemer must be our model, and according to the teaching of St. Paul, we must "put on Christ." (Rom. 13, 14) The more enthusiastic we are for a teacher, the more readily we model ourselves after his example, and the more willingly we follow in his foot-steps. To become enthusiastic for our dear Redeemer and to take courage to follow Him, we shall make a preliminary meditation which constitutes the foundation for the other meditations on the following of Christ. It is called the meditation on the *Kingdom of Christ.*

Let us represent to ourselves our Divine Redeemer indefatigably traversing the Holy Land, teaching and conferring blessings everywhere, and let us ask Him for the grace to heed His call and to follow it with the greatest enthusiasm.

I

As an *introduction* to this meditation, we shall represent to ourselves a temporal prince equipped with all the virtues of a good ruler. Then let us imagine him publishing the following appeal or invitation to his people: "My intention is to open a campaign against our enemies. I myself shall take the lead in this undertaking and be at the head of everything. Come then, gather around me and my standard. I require of you no greater sacrifice, fatigue and privation than I myself shall put up

with. The victory is certainly ours. And I shall moreover richly reward all according to the measure in which they have participated in my undertaking."

What answer would all the faithful, patriotic, and energetic subjects give to such a call and proclamation? With great enthusiasm they would enlist in the undertaking, and pledge their life and property for the honor of their country, for their prince and their sovereign. Let us but ask history. How often did not a whole people rise as one man to defend their country, to conquer new territory? How often did not subjects give their blood and life for their sovereign? Think of the Greeks and the Romans, of the French at the time of Napoleon I, or of the Swiss and Tyrolese in their various wars for freedom. What loyalty was shown, although the leaders were not always endowed with all human advantages, the undertakings were not always just, the princes did not always take the lead, but remained at home surrounded by comfort, while their subjects were bleeding and dying on the battlefield. And the reward which these devoted followers received for their toils and sacrifices was small, — often only a word of praise, a token of honor, a slight preferment; and frequently no reward at all for loss of limb, or even of life itself.

II

What we have thus far considered as an imaginary story we shall now apply to our Divine Redeemer.

He is really our Lord and King: "But I am appointed King by him over Sion, his holy mountain." (Ps. 2, 6) "He is king of kings and Lord of lords." (Apoc. 19, 16) He invites us to a campaign against the enemies of God, to found and expand the kingdom of God upon earth and to save many lost souls. He assures us that He Himself will take the lead in everything, and we have but to follow Him. He requires no more of us than what He Himself did do. He assures us of victory and promises us a splendid reward according to our participation.

III

What shall our *resolution* to this invitation sound like? Not to be carried away by a momentary impassioned enthusiasm, we will study the program of our Divine Redeemer, test this call upon us, and then give our well considered answer.

1. Who is it that calls upon us? It is the Son of God.

2. What right has He to call us? Or in other words, what reason has He to call on us to follow Him and to participate in His undertaking? He can with full authority require of us to join Him for:

a. He is our *Creator,* to whom we owe all we are and have.

b. He is our *Redeemer,* who rescued us from eternal perdition and purchased us with His precious

Blood: "You are not your own, for you are bought with a great price." (I Cor. 6, 19)

c. He is our greatest *Benefactor* through the whole of our lives; we owe Him a debt of heartfelt gratitude.

d. And if we are *priests* or *religious,* we are in duty bound to share all His views, because of our calling and our state of life, and by reason of the solemn sacrifice we made of ourselves.

3. What is the *form* of the invitation? Our Divine Redeemer does not stand on His well-grounded rights, He does not force, He does not threaten with thunder and lightning those who hang back. He appeals to the heart; He appeals to our generosity; He invites us.

4. To what does He invite us? To the *grandest undertaking* we can think of: To spread the kingdom of God upon earth; to glorify His Holy Name, to build up the Church of God, which shall stand invincible against all the attacks of hell: "and the gates of hell shall not prevail against her" (Matt. 16, 18); to preach the doctrine of eternal salvation, to save immortal souls; in a word, to coöperate in the work which the Son of God, Infinite Wisdom itself, came down from heaven to begin and to complete. Are we ambitious? Then we must feel flattered that the Son of God deigns to claim our poor efforts. Have we great plans in mind? Then see the wide field in which to spend our talents and powers in the most noble manner which an ambition

for great things can think of and wish for. Compared with this call, every worldly call dwindles away, be it ever so honorable in the eyes of men. Worldly careers are busy with cobwebs, houses of cards, and air-castles; godly careers with glorifying God and promoting the salvation of souls.

5. And what are the *conditions* which He lays down? He asks of us no more than He Himself has done; no greater privations than those He took upon Himself; no obedience more difficult, no humility more profound, no cross more painful than He Himself submitted to. He was the Son of God, the Lord of the world, the Innocent One; and all that He did was for us. When we come down to reality, He is satisfied with much less, with the tenth part of what He Himself has done, even with a mere shadow of it. For such humility, such poverty, such obedience as He practiced, He does not ask us for.

6. Who are our *comrades* in this campaign? Who can count them? Let us in spirit glance over the centuries from the death and resurrection of Christ, at all the Apostles and apostolic men who sowed the seed of the Gospel; at the martyrs who supported the cause of Jesus Christ by shedding their blood; at all the saints and confessors who faithfully followed His teachings; at the virgins who adorn the Church of God; at all the missionaries, both men and women, who in our own days work so heroically in most far-off lands, among barbarous

people. What an honor to work, to struggle and to battle at the side of these for the kingdom of God!

7. What will be the *result?* Most favorable. For even if all my exertions and all my labors be without any apparent results, provided I belong to the army of Christ, whose victory is infallibly certain, I shall have my share in that victory as a soldier of a conquering army. And if I have but helped in saving *one* soul, the result will fill me with everlasting joy.

8. Since among men the prospect of gain is so powerful to determine them for an undertaking, let us glance at the *reward* that awaits us. Our Leader richly rewards the least share in His undertaking. He holds out to us an eternal reward, a glorious crown of victory. Every step we take for His cause, every bead of perspiration that falls for His undertaking, every word spoken in His honor, will be counted and recorded in the book of life to await its final reward. Are we greedy of gain? Here we can secure the richest prize, of which death cannot rob us but rather make it secure for us.

What, then, should our *resolution* be? Are we patriotically and energetically inclined? Are we noble-minded, with high ideals, looking for honor and for gain? All this must urge us to say with all earnestness, as did the scribe: "Master, I will follow thee, whithersoever thou shalt go." (Matt. 8, 19.) Or with Ethai the Gethite who said to

David: "As the Lord liveth, and as my lord the king liveth, in what place soever thou shalt be, my lord, O king, either in death, or in life, there will thy servant be." (II Kings 15, 21) Let us present ourselves with all our strength and talents to the Lord, that He may deign graciously to accept our service in His cause and undertaking. May He draw us ever further into His following, so that we be filled with His spirit. His spirit is the spirit of mortification and self-denial, for He has said: "If any man will come after Me, let him deny himself." (Luke 9, 23) The more we deny ourselves, the sooner shall we distinguish ourselves in following Him.

XI. THE KINGDOM OF CHRIST

Repetition of the Meditation

The meditation on the *kingdom of Christ* is so important and so fundamental for all those who follow Him that we can repeat it with great utility in order to become thoroughly filled with the spirit of following and imitating Christ. By doing so we harken to the admonition of St. Paul: "Be renewed in the spirit of your mind, and put ye on the new man" (Eph. 4, 23), who is Christ our Lord and Master. By doing this we shall advance in following the other admonition: "For let this mind be in you which was also in Jesus Christ." (Phil. 2, 5)

That we come to be of the same mind with Christ, and even attain perfect conformity to it. "And I live, now not I, but Christ liveth in me." (Gal. 2, 20)

I

Let us consider how much men do for their earthly rulers. Princes and potentates are but mortals, alive today and tomorrow no more, mere men with all their deficiencies and faults; and yet how much service they demand from their subjects! Think of the many laws and regulations to which citizens are subjected, and by which they are often oppressed; of the taxes imposed without consideration; of the military service, which demands so many sacrifices. And often the motives which govern the rulers in their demands and regulations are not all noble or pure, or even reasonable. And how meager is the reward! It is not even adequate to the service rendered; earthy, only for this world, and, such as it is, finally snatched from us by death. What, then, do we owe to the Son of God, the King of kings?

2. Testing the Programme

Now once more test the *programme* of our Divine Redeemer point for point, and apply to it the words of the preface of the Mass: "Truly it is meet and just, right and profitable" that, with all our strength and ability we enter upon and take part in the glori-

ous campaign which our Divine Savior opened. To encourage yourselves still more for it, think what for centuries the *saints* have done for it, what so many *missionaries* and *sisters* are doing for it in our own days, who under our very eyes, amidst the greatest sacrifices and privations are cheerfully working to spread the kingdom of God and to save souls. We find them everywhere, under the burning rays of the tropical sun, in the icy regions of the north, in the primeval forests of Africa, among the lepers on the islands of the ocean. Let us also bear in mind the *zeal* of so many *lay-people* who bravely battle for the cause of Jesus Christ, and often make great sacrifices. Let us not hold back and in discouragement rest on our oars.

3. *Resolution*

Whoever has a spark of generosity for our Divine Savior and quietly considers His call, will with the whole energy of his will "offer himself entirely for the work." (Book of Exercises.) *Entirely,* with all his strength, talents, and ability he will dedicate himself for this sublime calling; *entirely*, as to time, forever; *entirely,* entering fully into the plans of the Divine Savior, and therefore striving to do "all for the greater honor and glory of God." This will become his device and motto.

Still we must not be content with decisions and beautiful resolutions. If we wish to coöperate in spreading the kingdom of God, we must begin with

ourselves and establish, strengthen, broaden, and deepen the kingdom of God within ourselves. God must entirely rule and govern us, according to the petition: "Thy kingdom come." Hence we must strive to have God rule our *understanding,* by a lively faith; our *will,* by cheerful obedience, whereby we subject ourselves to His most holy will; our *heart,* by His love; our *strength* and *talents,* that we be subservient to Him for His glory. But since there is so much opposed to God living and working in us, we must above all *open the campaign against ourselves.* For how can we hope to battle successfully against the external enemies of God, if His kingdom is not established within ourselves, if many enemies such as sensuality, concupiscence, and love of the world rise up within us against Him and His most holy will? A monarch who intends to begin a campaign against his enemies first of all sees to it that there is peace and concord within his own territory. Hence our Divine Savior insists: "If any man will come after me, let him deny himself." (Matt. 16, 24) And St. Ignatius requires as the fruit of this meditation that those who wish to distinguish themselves in following Christ and sharing His undertaking should not only offer themselves entirely for all the labors and hardships of this campaign, but also exert themselves to fight against sensuality, against the lust of the flesh and the love of the world.

This demand can be explained and supported,

first, by a comparison with soldiers. They are the better qualified to contribute to victory, the more they are hardened and ready to take upon themselves labor and privations. Secondly, from the nature of the case. In saving souls we are but instruments in the hands of God. But the force of the master enters sooner and more perfectly into the instrument, the better it is adapted to the artist and, as it were, coalesces with him. We shall be more useful, docile and pliable as instruments in the hands of our Divine Savior if there be less in us that resists Him; that is, the more we mortify and deaden within us all that is opposed to God, our evil passions and disorderly self-love. For this we have the splendid record of the lives of the saints who have done so much for the cause of Christ.

In the light of these considerations let us generously accept the invitation of our Lord and our God, and let us express our sentiments in the earnest and beautiful prayer which St. Ignatius concludes this meditation. "O eternal Lord of all things, I make my oblation with Thy favor and help, before Thy infinite goodness, in the presence of Thy glorious mother, and of the whole court of heaven, that I wish and desire, and that it is my deliberate determination, so it be for Thy greater service and praise, to imitate Thee in bearing injuries and reproaches, and in all poverty, both actual and spiritual, if Thy most holy Majesty wilt choose and receive me for such a life and state."

If we are priests, we shall try to work zealously for the interests of our Divine Savior and according to His intentions, in the pulpit, in the school, in the confessional, in the care of souls, on every suitable occasion. If we are preparing for the priestly calling, let us distinguish ourselves in the campaign within and against ourselves, to be enabled to fight more valiantly against the enemies of the Church; and let us improve and perfect ourselves by prayer and study to become fit instruments in the hand of God.

SPIRITUAL READING

The Strongholds of the Evil Spirit Within Us

In the meditation on the Kingdom of Christ we insisted on the practical application that we must begin with ourselves, if we wish to coöperate in spreading and supporting the kingdom of God. This thought we now wish to develop a little more. Then only is an empire subdued when its fortresses, behind which the enemy is for the most part and most stubbornly entrenched, have also been taken and conquered, and his allies have been humbled. If the forts are still in the hands of the opponents, they are still powerful and threatening, and there can be no thought of taking secure possession of the land. The evil spirit has powerful allies within us and entrenches himself in *four fortresses,* from

which he fights against the kingdom of God within us, trying to destroy it. Let us learn to know these four fortresses in order to take and, if possible, dismantle them.

I

The *first* stronghold is the *flesh* with its concupiscences, which so often rebels against the spirit. "For the flesh lusteth against the spirit." (Gal. 5, 17.) This war upon what is good St. Paul describes so clearly and distinctly in his Epistle to the Romans (7, 14 sq.): "But I see," he writes (5, 23), "another law in my members, fighting against the law of my mind, and captivating me in the law of sin, that is in my members." Against this stronghold we must open hostilities.

a. We must with the strongest possible determination refuse the flesh everything that is forbidden. "I say then, walk in the spirit, and you shall not fulfil the lusts of the flesh." (Gal. 5, 16.)

b. To become certain in doing this, we must be severe with the flesh and at times even refuse it something that is not forbidden, according to the admonition of the Holy Spirit: "He that nourisheth his servant delicately from his childhood, afterwards shall find him stubborn." (Prov. 29, 21)

c. We must positively mortify the flesh, according to the example of St. Paul, who wrote: "But I chastise my body and bring it into subjection, lest,

perhaps, when I have preached to others I myself should become a castaway." (I Cor. 9, 27)

I shall now examine myself on these points:

1. Have I been temperate in eating and drinking? Have I indulged in sleeping too long?

2. Am I not too solicitous for my bodily welfare? too delicate and too effeminate in the treatment of my body? This would be against the admonition of St. Paul: "And make not provisions for the flesh in its concupiscences." (Rom. 13, 14)

3. Do I earnestly try to mortify my eyes, my ears, my curiosity? Or do I give my senses too much liberty? Do I practise at least moderate penances, to bridle the inordinate cravings of the flesh?

4. Am I not too sensitive about the inclemency of the weather, about heat and cold, or about the ailments of the body?

5. Do I moan and complain too much in suffering and pain? Am I impatient in sickness? Do I murmur too readily, even against God?

Therefore, up and fight the *lust* of the *flesh*, mindful of the sufferings of our Divine Savior, especially of His painful scourging, and mindful also of the warning of St. Paul: "And they who are in the flesh cannot please God." "For if you live according to the flesh, you shall die." (Rom. 8, 13) "And they that are Christ's have crucified their flesh, with the vices and concupiscences." (Gal. 5, 24) And we should be mindful of the example of

the saints, who did not nurse the flesh, but rather lived in constant enmity with the flesh.

The *second* bulwark is the *senses,* through which the evil spirit keeps open for himself an entrance into the soul. "For death is come up through our windows." (Jer. 9, 21) Through the ears the evil spirit paved his way to the heart of Eve; through the eyes death entered the soul of David. (II Kings 11, 2) Through intercourse with the world the enemy of God forces his way into the human heart, inclined as it is to evil: "The wicked have told me fables, but not as thy law." (Ps. 118, 85) Hence the urgent warning of Christ: "Watch ye and pray that ye enter not into temptation." (Matt. 26, 41) In a fortress watchfulness is above all directed to the approaches and gates, for if but one gate is open and not guarded, the fortress is lost. So we cannot preserve within us innocence, grace, and the kingdom of God when doors and windows stand wide open through which the evil spirit may easily find access to our hearts. "But while men were asleep, the enemy came and oversowed cockle among the wheat, and went his way." (Matt. 13, 25) What the Savior here relates is alas! but too often true, especially in youth. Young people readily absorb through the senses the poison of corruption which in various alluring forms and appearances, in an open or hidden manner offers itself to them. Therefore along the whole line of the senses —"Watch!"

Examine yourself on the use of your senses. Am I cautious in the use of my eyes with regard to obscene pictures and other dangerous objects? Am I careful in the reading of books which are dangerous to faith and morals? Do I follow the prudent advice of the Holy Spirit: "Hedge in thy ears with thorns; hear not a wicked tongue; and make doors and bars of thy mouth." (Eccl. 28, 28) Do I bridle my curiosity, or do I wish, without selection, to see, hear, know, and partake of everything, whether it is suitable, becoming, and useful or not?

The *third* bulwark, *self-love,* intrudes itself everywhere, makes its influence felt, is obtrusive, and never yields. And because it is self-seeking, it very often conflicts with the love of God. It can disguise itself and play the hypocrite, it is clever and eloquent in attaining its end. It has three spoiled children: *stubbornness, wilfulness*, and *selfishness,* by which it is easily recognized. If God shall reign within me, and if I am to be His kingdom, I must keep my self-love subordinate to the love of God, and antagonize self-love whenever it is in conflict with the love of God.

Ask yourself therefore: Do I belong to those of whom the Apostle says: "For all seek the things that are their own; not the things that are Jesus Christ's." (Phil. 2, 21) Am I self-seeking? Do I seek my own honor instead of the honor of God, and that even in holy things? Am I self-willed and stubborn toward my superiors and my

brethren? Is envy astir within me, when others do more, and are noticeably blessed in their labors? Do I lose courage when my efforts do not meet with the success I am eagerly looking for? Am I resigned to the holy will of God, even when He ordains something different from that which I desire and wish for? In a word, is the love of God the norm of my will and of my love? Do I try to purify and ennoble my self-love, and make it radiant with the love of God? The bulwark of self-love must fall, which as long as it is opposed to the love of God, corrupts and makes worthless everything that is rooted in it, even if it appears to be ever so good in itself.

The *fourth* bulwark is the *love of the world.* The world with its joys and pleasures, its wealth and honors, entices the human heart and makes it a prisoner, so that it forgets eternity, heaven and the soul, gives itself up to earthly things and strives after fleeting pleasures. Often does the tempter come up to us, especially to the souls of the young, as he did to the Savior, with his seductive promises: "All these, the kingdoms of the world and the glory of them, will I give to thee if falling down thou wilt adore me." (Matt. 4, 9) There is in us an inborn craving to become conspicuous, to acquire honors and have influence. We are animated with the spirit of the world, opposed to the spirit of Jesus Christ, and it rules our thoughts, words and actions. We say with the world: Blessed are the rich;

blessed are they who are at ease and comfortable, who suffer no persecution, etc., contradicting entirely the Sermon on the Mount as an expression of the sentiments of our Divine Savior. Often we deny our own better knowledge in order not to displease the world. And this very love of the world also begets an incurable human respect which rules our converse with the outer world. How often must not the kingdom of God withdraw and God be restricted in His right to rule!

Therefore let us be alert and fight the spirit of the world. Fear God above all, serve God above all, please God above all, for He is our Lord and Judge. "If I yet pleased men, I should not be the servant of Christ." (Gal. 1, 10) We must follow the principles of our Divine Redeemer, not those of the world; and since our Divine Redeemer praises poverty, humility, and contempt for the world, we must inhale this spirit, be filled with this spirit, and permeated with it. What the world looks upon as great and desirable, "I count all things to be but a loss for the excellent knowledge of Jesus Christ my Lord; for whom I suffered the loss of all things, and count them but as dung, that I may gain Christ." (Phil. 3, 8) In fighting the world we must continue until we can say with St. Paul: "The world is crucified to me and I to the world." (Gal. 6, 14) It is only then that the kingdom of God will take full effect and become firmly established within us.

If we are in earnest to follow Christ, and if we

wish to coöperate sincerely in His royal undertaking, we must keep a sharp eye on this fourfold bulwark, behind which the evil spirit takes shelter, and from which he attacks the dominion of God within us and tries to make it fall. Let us say: "I will pursue after my enemies and crush them: and will not return till I consume them." (II Kings 22, 38) The fight is necessary, the battle-field wide, the victory difficult; but let us have courage and confidence, for Christ is with us.

IV. CONSIDERATION: MEDITATION

Our task is "to put on Christ," to form ourselves after our Lord and Master, to become conformed to Him, and to present the Lord in us. *Meditation* is an approved means to do this. Many shrink from it because they think that meditation is only for the elect, the holy souls and religious. This is a mistaken view. Meditation is for all who wish to live and act as reasonable beings. To correct erroneous views, to encourage this pious practice, and to instruct in it, we shall briefly consider: the *necessity* of meditation, *its nature,* and *the way to make it.*

I. The Necessity of Meditation

Meditation is necessary even in the *natural* order, if we wish to lead a life here on earth that is worthy of a human being. Look at the working-man. He has a work to do, and meditates. He thinks of the

object to be attained, on the means to be made use of, of the difficulties to be surmounted; reflects on the easiest, handiest, and quickest way of doing it, and then goes to work; that is, he meditates beforehand. Look at the traveler. He determines on the place whither he wants to go, examines the road that leads to it, notes the short cuts to reach his destination quickly, thinks of the provisions, of the money or food which he must take along with him, considers how to make the journey pleasant, useful, and interesting, foresees the difficulties and obstacles he may meet with; in a word, he meditates on his plan, and on the way to carry it out, and thus with deliberation enters upon his journey. If we would like to be in the good graces of an official, we study his character, consider the form in which to clothe our petition, and search for the best opportunity to lay it before him. Even children meditate at their plays. How cautious, cunning and tricky they are at their games to obtain the advantage over an opponent. Thus meditation plays a very important part in every-day life. How, then, are we going to lead a truly Christian, supernatural, and spiritual life without it? It requires meditation to transact the business of salvation despite its many difficulties and obstacles, to find the road to salvation, and heaven itself with certainty, despite the dangers which threaten us and the enemies that lie in wait for our destruction. By no means should we dare to lead a haphazard spiritual life, but rather

study how to be always pleasing to God, and to obtain His favor and grace.

2. To make the necessity of meditation still clearer, we may avail ourselves of a few *comparisons.* What *bread* is to the body, *oil* to the lamp, and *water* to the tender plant, that meditation is to the spiritual life. As *bread* is necessary to sustain, nourish, and develop the life of the body, so is meditation necessary for the soul. We must again and again call to mind the eternal truths, bring before our eyes the virtuous example of Christ, and let the powerful motives of faith have an influence on us, to protect us from sin, to strengthen us in doing good and to grow in virtue; otherwise we shall soon relax, become lukewarm, and easily fall: "In all thy works remember thy last end, and thou shalt never sin." (Eccl. 7, 40) As the most brilliant light gradually weakens and at last dies out if *oil* or other fuel is not constantly supplied, so the splendor of virtues and of good example grows dim unless we are constantly in the rays of the brilliant examples of the virtuous life of Christ. In our meditations we must absorb the light which beams forth from Him on His teachings and example, so that we can then direct it towards others. As the young plant must be diligently *sprinkled,* so too our good resolutions of the exercises need care and attention, else they will not take root, grow up, get strong, bloom and bear fruit. We must sprinkle them by often diligently considering the motives which in-

duced us to make them and recalling the example of the Savior which shames our negligence,— in a word, we must meditate.

3. "My just man liveth by faith." (Heb. 10, 38) As a human being should live according to the dictates of reason, so the just man, the true Christian and child of God, should live by faith. He should walk in the light of faith, judge everything by the principles of faith, and ennoble, transfigure, even deify his whole life by faith. But the principles of Jesus Christ, especially as we find them laid down in the Sermon on the Mount, are strange to our sensual nature. They conflict with the principles which spoiled nature suggests and which our education, reading, and mixing with the world have made dominant in us. We must do our utmost to absorb the doctrines of Jesus Christ, be enlightened by them, and, by means of them, uproot and cast aside the sentiments of the world, to replace them by the views of Christ, and gradually to make them our own. That can be done only by meditation,— recalling the principles of Christ, repeating them often to ourselves, familiarizing ourselves with them and acquiring a liking for them, until they enter into our flesh and blood, and penetrate and govern our thoughts. It is only by meditation that faith becomes the soul of our supernatural and truly Christian life. "My just man liveth by faith."

4. If we are priests, meditation is doubly neces-

sary for us to make our sermons useful and practical. The sermon which grows out of meditation is much more effective than that which we copy out of a book. St. Augustine makes this clear by an apt illustration. The child needs nourishment to live and develop. The mother sets bread and meat before the child; it is of no use, the child will starve. Why? Because it has as yet no teeth, and can not bite and eat meat and bread. What does the mother do that the child may not die of hunger? She eats the meat and bread, converts the food into milk, and in this form offers it as nourishment to the child. For in this form the child can assimilate the nourishment, and will live, grow, and wax strong. Thus the pastor must absorb the doctrinal truths, spiritually digest them and change them into milk, that is, clothe them in a clear, intelligible, and attractive style, and so give them out to the faithful who will be benefited by them. St. Paul made use of the same comparison in writing to the Corinthians: "As unto little ones in Christ, I give you milk to drink, not meat, for you were not able as yet." (I Cor. 3, 1) Whoever in diligent meditation goes through the doctrines and virtuous example of our divine Savior, will not want useful matter for sermons. "Out of the abundance of the heart the mouth speaketh." (Matt. 12, 34)

II. The Nature of Meditation

We must not understand meditation to consist in

a very special interior communication with God, which includes extraordinary illumination and revelations, and which is granted by a special grace to but a few holy souls. Meditation is something very simple, possible for all; and as we have said in the beginning, it is used more often than we suppose even in purely temporal affairs. To make it very clear to you what meditating means, we shall again employ a few comparisons.

1. Meditation is like *sculpture work.* What does the sculptor intend to do? Before him on the one side is a model, on the other a block of marble or wood, out of which he intends to carve a statue. He carefully studies his model and then works on the block of marble with hammer and chisel. At first large chips fall off, but the work becomes steadily more delicate until gradually hands, chest and feet appear, then even the more delicate parts. At last the statue stands finished before him, a striking likeness of the model. This is what we must do in meditation. Our divine Savior stands before us in His ideal perfection, and we are to reproduce Him in ourselves. We must carefully study Him and consider how He feels, thinks, and acts; then look at ourselves and note how in everything we are unlike Him. Then letting all motives act on us, we must gradually do away with the faults which make us so unlike our Lord and "put Him on," that is, copy in succession His virtues so that we become living images of our Savior. Here we have an

inviting task to dwell on in meditation during the year.

2. Meditation is like working in a *garden*. The gardener sees before him a bed full of weeds, thistles and thorns, where he would like to lay out a nice plot of flowers. What does he do? With great diligence he first pulls up the weeds, then plants roses, violets, carnations, or other flowers, carefully sprinkles the tender plants, and watches lest the weeds spring up again to choke them. Thus an attractive flower-garden is made. Our heart should be a garden in which our Savior loves to dwell. But how many weeds are growing there! How many good resolutions have been choked! To make it beautiful, the weeds of disorderly inclinations and passions must be rooted up and the virtues becoming our state of life planted, sprinkled, and cared for until they take root and grow,—the violets of humility, the lilies of purity, and the roses of love. We must keep a careful eye on the weeds of our disorderly inclinations, and if any of them should spring up again, quickly uproot it. All this we do in a meditation while we change our heart into a little flower-garden where the Lord desires to dwell.

3. Meditation is a *school*. Students who are eager to learn frequent the lectures of some learned professor, are attentive to every word and impress it upon their memory. Later they think the lesson over, study the matter until it becomes their

own mental property and a light for their future work. Thus you must think when you prepare for meditation: I am now going to school to our Divine Savior, the eternal Wisdom. What a teacher He is! "Lord, to whom shall we go? Thou hast the words of eternal life." (John 6, 69) Sit down with Magdalen at the feet of this Teacher and be all ears. To-day listen to His instruction on humility, to-morrow on meekness, at another time on patience, and thus learn in this sublime school of virtue to transform your whole earthly life, to transfigure and sanctify it. If you begin the meditation in this spirit, and if you are really practical, it will be very useful to you and you will make progress in the Christian life.

III. Method of Meditation

We shall briefly point out *three* ways in which a meditation may be made.

First, by applying the three powers of the soul, *memory, understanding* and *will.* For prayer is also, when it is interior and meditative, an elevation of the spirit to God, a communication with Him in which all the powers of the soul participate. We should first determine exactly the subject-matter of the meditation, and divide the principal ideas into points, so as not to plunge into the meditation wholly unprepared. Indeed, even the student is advised to familiarize himself before the lectures with the topic to be discussed, that he may follow his teacher with

greater concentration of mind. Since everything depends on God's blessing, we must ask for light from above, especially for the grace to obtain the fruit which we desire to reap from our meditation. That the imagination may not carry us away or disturb us, it is advisable to make it serve us in meditation by representations suitable to our subject. If we have taken a doctrine of our Lord, let us represent Him to ourselves as speaking to us, and ourselves as sitting at His feet. After this preparation we must apply the three powers of the soul: first, the *memory,* by accurately calling to mind the event on which we intend to mediate, together with the circumstances that accompany it; and if a doctrine of Christ is to occupy our attention, by recalling its contents and bearing. This done, we offer the material thus gathered clearly and distinctly to the understanding to work on. Now the *understanding* becomes active to solve the questions mooted by the matter given. For example, who has practiced this virtue? The Son of God. Why? To what perfection? In what circumstances? Have I this virtue? Why should I have it? What motives urge me to acquire it? When, where, and how can I practice it? What obstacles are in the way?

After the understanding has been absorbed long enough in the subject, the *will* becomes active. It admires our Divine Savior, is grateful to Him for the beautiful example He has given us, expresses

its ardent desire for this virtue, tells its shame and confusion for being without it, and gives vent to its sorrow and repentance for having worked against it. The will then passes on to decide and resolve that it will strive after this virtue, adopt the proper means to acquire it, and look for opportunities to practice it. These resolutions we must recommend to the Lord and ask Him for grace to carry them out, because without the help of God we can do nothing. We conclude the meditation with a colloquy or familiar personal prayer.

For this manner of meditating we need no other book than the Gospels or other books of Holy Writ.

The *second* way of meditating consists in applying the *five senses*. It can be especially made use of when we wish to meditate on events in the life of our Lord and of His holy Mother, as, the birth of our Lord, His flight into Egypt, His hidden life at Nazareth, the last supper, His cruel sufferings. According to this method we meditated (page 64) on the terrors of hell. As we then gave an example how to make such a meditation, we need not add further directions about it here. This manner of meditating is adapted to reform the exterior man, to mould our whole demeanor after our model Jesus Christ, and to sanctify the use of the senses. To make the meditation still more productive, the spiritual senses of our soul must penetrate those of our Divine Savior, and form the interior man according to them also.

The *third* manner of acquiring facility in meditative prayer consists in selecting some common oral prayers, dwelling upon every word in them, awakening within ourselves appropriate sentiments and drawing suggestive resolutions from them. Let us illustrate with the Lord's prayer, the "Our Father." What beautiful and delicate sentiments we can awaken within us! As Almighty God is my *Father,* what an honor for me,— how He must love me and take care of me — with a childlike love I must reciprocate, and obey Him and please Him. I must demean myself as a child of God, be an honor to my state in life and to my nobility. *Our* Father; therefore we are all brothers, and must live in peace and concord, be of one heart and one soul.

Thus we can, for hours, be usefully occupied with one prayer, like St. Francis of Assisi, who occupied himself the longest time with these words, "My God and my all," and shed floods of tears while he did so. This manner of meditating is to be recommended for the time of aridity and poor health, when strenuous mental application is not permitted, or when one is traveling. It offers this further advantage, that as a rule we say oral prayers with more devotion, fervor and unction; because of the sentiments which absorbed us entirely by meditating on them, are easily awakened during fast praying, and we shall say these prayers with more relish. In this manner we can usefully meditate on the psalms and the litanies.

Since we have seen that meditating is *necessary* and *useful* and *not at all difficult,* we should use it as a means, and become familiar with it. It will help us to make progress in the school of the Sacred Heart, to lead a really Christian, a truly priestly life, full of the spirit of our Lord and Master. Let us not be easily drawn away from it. It is only by meditating that we can acquire, cultivate and promote the good spirit of the Exercises, which we have during these days awakened in us.

XII. MEDITATION:

THE INCARNATION OF THE SON OF GOD

"I will follow thee whithersoever thou shalt go," is the decision we came to in our meditation on the kingdom of Christ. We wish "to put on Christ," to form ourselves after Him as our model. We must, therefore, step by step closely observe Him from His conception to His glorious ascension, and from it all learn what He has done and suffered. We must closely consider and study His earthly life, and go to Him to school. During this hour we shall occupy ourselves with His *Incarnation.* "And the Word was made flesh." (John 1, 14) To obtain a fertile field for meditating, we shall divide the meditation into three parts:

1. The sad *condition* of the human race before the Incarnation of the Son of God;

2. *Introduction* to the Incarnation of the Son of God.

3. *Carrying* the plan of God into effect.

We shall in haste call to mind what holy writ says about it: "All flesh had corrupted its way upon the earth." (Gen. 6, 12) But God in His mercy decreed to redeem the sinful race. "God so loved the world, as to give his only begotten Son." (John 3, 16) An angel is sent to a virgin by the name of Mary, to present the decree of the most holy Trinity. Scarcely had the virgin given her consent, "and the Word was made flesh." Let us try to be present at everything that is going on; be in the midst of the turmoil of the human race that has forgotten its God, be at the council of the most holy Trinity, accompany the heavenly messenger to the virgin, be edified at her humility and resignation to the will of God, and adore the Son of God made man. Let us ask for light from above in order to penetrate this mystery of love and be filled with love for the Son of God so deeply humiliated, so that we give ourselves to follow Him with a stronger resolve.

I. The World Before the Incarnation

In every event observe the persons who take part in it, their words and acts, and thus obtain rich material for meditation. Let all the people of the heathen world pass before your mind, their age, rank, and social position. What would they be

without Christ? How sad their lot when their *intellectual* condition is considered! Think of their teachings on idolatry, of their ignorance and doubt about the most important questions concerning the human race, about the hereafter, about the immortality of the soul. As to their *morality*, call to mind their idol worship, their moral corruption and depravity, the decadence in the practice of every higher virtue. In the *social* order, note the tyranny of the princes and the slavery of the masses. And what the ancient nations were without Christ, that the pagan nations are to-day. Listen to the *conversations:* how empty, how vain, how shallow, how cold, how deceitful! Observe their *business* life. How they pursue earthly, perishable goods, sensual pleasures and empty honors; and forgetting their immortal soul, the heaven for which they were created and destined, the eternity without end, the end of their restless striving; — they are tending to hell.

Let us on this occasion consider individual persons who through Christ became great. How small, how miserable, how insignificant they were before grace converted them! What was *Saul* before the call of Christ pressed upon him and he became Paul? A persecutor of the innocents. What was *Francis of Assisi* before grace had taken hold of him? A dealer in worldly goods. What was *Francis Xavier* before St. Ignatius gained him for Christ? A professor chasing after fleeting re-

nown. And what became of them through the grace of Christ? An apostle of the gentiles, a founder of a religious order, a mighty instrument in the hand of God.

Thinking of myself, what was I without Christ? A sinner, a leper, a slave of my passions, a prodigal son, insensible to what is really good and to my need of redemption. This twofold consideration is very well adapted to make evident the greatness of the grace of redemption and its power to make something great out of a miserable human being. Hence we must yearn for it, and after God has offered it to us in Christ our Lord, take courage to make good use of it.

II. Preparation of the Incarnation

1. Let us ascend in spirit into heaven and vividly represent to ourselves the decision of the most Holy Trinity to redeem the fallen human race. Moses depicts the three divine Persons in council about the creation of man: "Let us make man to our image and likeness." (Gen. 1, 26) Let it be permitted us to think of that council when there was question of a far grander work of God's goodness and omnipotence than creation. Even if justice calls for expiation, "Mercy exalteth itself above Judgment." (James 2, 13) The Holy Trinity determined on the redemption of man and on the Incarnation of the Second Divine Person. We shall here consider how God in His mercy is mindful of the human race,

whereas the human race lives on unmindful of God; how He ever determines on new and greater benefits, while men ever heap sin upon sin; how God always draws near and condescends to man, while man always withdraws farther and flees from God. Let me now apply this to myself. God, in His paternal love, has always been mindful of me, "Yea I have loved thee with an everlasting love." (Jer. 31, 3) And I, in my youth, have been unmindful of Him. God is always taking care of me, and I neglected His service. God followed me, and I went away with the prodigal son into a far country (Luke 15, 13), into the country of the forgetfulness of God.

2. In the fullness of time the decree of the Most Holy Trinity is to be *carried into effect.* A heavenly messenger is deputed to usher in its execution. "The angel Gabriel was sent" (Luke 1, 26), an enviable charge. Let us accompany him in his flight. He is not directed to Rome, where noble, rich, and cultured princesses could have been found; not to Alexandria, nor to Jerusalem. He flies past the great cities. A little town, Nazareth in Galilee, is the term of his mission, and even there he does not look for a stately mansion. At a small, unpretentious cottage he makes a halt, and appears to a virgin whose name is Mary. O how much there is here to see and to meditate upon!

3. Let us cast a glance at this envoy of God. How reverential he is when he greets the chosen one

of the Lord. Listen, and take to heart the glorious and comprehensive salutation: "Hail, full of grace, the Lord is with thee, blessed art thou among women." Let us now cast a glance on Mary, and ask: by what did she turn the eyes of God upon herself?

a. Because she was a *virgin* in the fullest sense of the word, pure, immaculate, ready to forego the offered dignity of mother if she had not been able to keep her vow of virginity.

b. Because she was so *humble*. This humility showed itself, because she was troubled when she heard the most honorable salutation; she did not surmise that she was the chosen mother of the Redeemer. Because she did not all at once reach out with both hands to grasp the proffered honor, she considered herself only a handmaid of the Lord, and notwithstanding her extraordinary exaltation, she hastens to Elizabeth to wait on her. By purity of heart and humility of sentiments we, too, can turn the eyes of God to us and draw His graces upon us.

c. Consider the *prudence* to Mary. She tests the message and does not at once give herself up to joy over the honorable salutation, mindful of the words, "All that glitters is not gold." Only after she is assured of the divine origin of the message, assured that her virginity is to remain intact, she gives her eternally memorable decision: "Behold the handmaid of the Lord; be it done to me according to thy word." Thereby she practices complete resignation

to the holy will of God, which alone was for her decisive, not her own honor and advantage. She practices humility, for she is entirely penetrated with her dependency on God, and ready to forego the honor proffered her, if God should decree otherwise. She practices fortitude, for she is ready to take upon herself all that was entailed in motherhood of a son destined to suffer and to die.

III. The Incarnation Effected

Scarcely had Mary given her consent by her "Fiat," "be it done to me according to thy word" (John 1, 14), than "the Word was made flesh."

1. Consider the mystery of divine *love,* which was revealed by the incarnation. "For God-so loved-the world-as to give-his only begotten-Son." (John 3, 16) Let us stop and ponder over every word; each one of them is full of meaning.

2. Ponder over the *humiliation* of the Son of God at His incarnation. "Who being in the form of God thought it not robbery to be equal to God; but emptied himself, taking the form of a servant, being made in the likeness of men, and in habit found as a man" (Phil. 2, 6, 7) — in all miseries, except sin, like unto us.

3. Let us search for the *reason* of this humiliation and emptying of Himself. Our Divine Redeemer wanted to begin His earthly career by giving an example of heroic humility. Adam, tempted by the words of the serpent, "You shall be as Gods"

(Gen. 3, 5), brought about the fall of the human race by his self-conceit. The Redeemer, the second Adam, by an act of humility atoned for the crime. In the very beginning He wanted to show us the road of humility of which we stand so much in need; for this road leads to grace. "God giveth grace to the humble." (James 4, 6) He wanted to build the sublime work of Redemption, the new creation of the human race, on humility as a foundation. This St. Augustine expresses beautifully in these words: "You aspire to great things, begin with little ones; you desire to erect a very high building, think first of the foundation of humility. The foundations are always sunk proportionately to the intended weight of the building; and the higher one intends it, the deeper must the foundation thereof be laid."

Let us go to this school of humility which the Son of God teaches by His incarnation. He lowered Himself: "Why is earth and ashes proud?" (Eccl. 10, 9) "I shall follow thee whithersoever thou shalt go," we have said. Let us begin with humility, for it is only by humility we shall draw the eyes of God upon ourselves, as Mary did. By humility we obtain grace; by humility we become useful instruments in the hands of God.

We shall conclude this meditation by adoring the Incarnate Son of God, cheerfully greet His coming, and fervently pray to Him for the spirit of humility, which entirely pervades this mystery.

FIFTH DAY

SCHOOL OF CHRIST

"Jesus began to do and to teach." (Acts 1, 1)
"Learn of me, because I am meek and humble of heart." (Matt. 11, 29)
"I do always the things that please him." (John 8, 29)

XIII. MEDITATION: THE BIRTH OF CHRIST

Let us call to mind all that the Gospel relates about the birth of our Lord. A decree went out from Cæsar Augustus that all should betake themselves to their own city to be enrolled. Accordingly Joseph went with Mary from Nazareth to Bethlehem, and finding no room in the inn, sought lodging in a stable, and there the Savior was born. Let us represent to ourselves the road to Bethlehem, Mary and Joseph walking along, and the stable; and let us ask for the grace to become ever more familiar with the spirit of our divine Savior, that we may be filled with it and thus make progress in following Him. We shall divide this meditation into three points.

I. The Journey to Bethlehem

Considering all the circumstances, the journey was very hard for Mary and Joseph. It was hard because:

a. Traveling in those days was not so easy as it is now.

b. They were poor. And for poor people traveling is always difficult.

c. Meanwhile St. Joseph had to stop working; and that is no little sacrifice for people without means.

d. The season was not inviting.

e. Mary was near her confinement. At home, in her poverty, she had everything ready to receive and nurse the Savior in a becoming manner; in a foreign country she had no home. That made the journey bitter and unpleasant.

f. Add to this that the decree was issued by a ruler who was a stranger, a heathen, and not at all in sympathy with the Jewish people.

But Mary who, when accepting the dignity of motherhood, said: "Behold, I am the handmaid of the Lord; be it done unto me according to thy word," submits to the will of God. Without a murmur of complaint, or delay, she at once gathers her few belongings and is on the way. See how they walk along in silence and meditation, eager to do the will of God; and when they speak, theirs are words of resignation and mutual edification.

II. Arrival in Bethlehem

Tired and fatigued they come to Bethlehem. St. Joseph at once looks for a lodging for Mary and the child. Accompany him on his humiliating and painful round. Everywhere he is turned away, and often, too, under flimsy and offensive pretexts. How hard it must have been for him to communicate to Mary the result of his fruitless efforts. Nothing remains but to seek shelter in an abandoned stable. St. John, filled with sorrow, gives us a report about it: "He came unto his own and His own received Him not." (1, 11) Stop at every word, excite within yourself a heartfelt sympathy for the holy family, especially for the coming Savior; and devoutly consider the fact that our Divine Savior, who has the hearts of all men in His hands, did not soften one of them to offer Him a proper lodging; but when His servants are concerned, He softens the hearts of many to receive them hospitably when for His sake they have been expelled from any place. Church history, even of recent date, gives us examples how members of religious orders, and also pious secular priests, who because of their faith and zeal had been banished from one land, found a hospitable reception in other lands. And many religious families who for love of Him had vowed poverty, have from one year's end to the other found sustenance. Furthermore consider, to your own shame, how often the reproach contained

in the words of St. John strike *you*. How often did our Savior wish to come to you, and you did not receive Him. You closed your heart and turned your back on Him.

Many a time, especially at Christmas, you think: Had I been living in Bethlehem at the time, how willingly I should have received our Divine Savior in my house and waited upon Him. What was not possible for you then, you can do now. For what you do to one of your brethren the Savior considers as done to Himself. How consoling the thought that by works of Christian charity you can make up for the cold-heartedness of the inhabitants of Bethlehem!

III. The Birth of Our Lord

"And she brought forth her firstborn son, and wrapped him up in swaddling clothes, and laid him in a manger; because there was no room for them in the inn." (Luke 2, 7) Adore the newborn Savior in the manger. Affectionately participate in the ineffable joy of the virgin mother and of St. Joseph, who now forgot all hardships, privations and humiliations, since for them the stable has become a paradise. Search into the mystery here consummated before your eyes. All the divine perfections of goodness, mercy, love, and omnipotence shine forth from it, more than from the creation of the universe. Already in the manger the Infant Jesus, by His example, teaches us a lesson of all vir-

tues in an heroic degree, which later as the dying Savior He wished to recommend as a compendium from the cross. The manger and the cross — what effective pulpits! Learn especially one virtue from the Infant Jesus in the manger. As humility shines forth from the incarnation, so the love of *poverty* from His birth. Humility and poverty are the pillars of the following of Christ. Meditate on all the characteristics of our Divine Savior's poverty at His birth.

1. It was *perfect*. Not only were superfluities wanting, but even necessaries, everything. A child could not come into the world under poorer conditions.

2. It was a poverty of His *own choice*. "Being rich, he became poor for our sakes." (II Cor. 8, 9) And this is the more to be wondered at since He could have redeemed us if He had been rich.

3. His poverty was *intended* and *sought*. He permitted the decree of Augustus to be issued at this time that He might come into the world among strangers and very poor. At Nazareth the maternal solicitude of Mary would have made it too comfortable for Him.

To strengthen ourselves in the love of poverty, we shall briefly consider how our Divine Savior recommended, ennobled and blessed poverty. He recommended it by freely *choosing* it. I reason thus: What eternal and infallible Wisdom chooses and prefers, must certainly be good and preferable.

But our Divine Savior preferred poverty to riches; not in words only but in deed also, for He chose it. Therefore it must be better than riches. He ennobled it; for He practiced it strictly during His whole life, and thereby transfigured it and made it divine. He blessed it, for what promises has He not held out to it: "Blessed are the poor in spirit for theirs is the kingdom of heaven." (Matt. 5, 3) "They shall receive a hundredfold, and shall possess life everlasting" (Matt. 19, 29); and even, as we read in Mark (10, 30), already here upon earth. No wonder, then, that poverty has become so attractive that thousands have chosen, vowed and practiced it. St. Francis of Assisi, filled with animation, called it his mistress and his bride, and felt happy in practicing it.

We shall close this meditation with a fervent prayer to the dear Infant Jesus to communicate to us that love of poverty which in the manger He so much recommended; and we shall resolve, in case we are not in duty bound to it by vow, to practice it at least in spirit by *detaching* our hearts from earthly goods, by *bridling* our too strong inclinations towards them, by being *content* with the means we possess, and by *reducing* our superfluous expenses, so that we may dispose of the money thus saved for the greater honor of God!

XIV. MEDITATION: THE FLIGHT INTO EGYPT

Introduction. Soon after the birth of our Lord, and after the wise men from the East had adored Him in the manger, St. Joseph received a message from the Lord to take the Child and His mother and flee into Egypt, because King Herod was seeking the life of the Child. He rose at once, set out on His journey, and remained in Egypt until the Lord recalled him. In the meantime Herod has all the children of Bethlehem and the surrounding country murdered, hoping thereby to put out of the way the new-born King of the Jews, whom the wise men had announced, and to secure the safety of his throne, which, in his jealousy, he was afraid to lose. We shall be present in mind at all these events, and ask our Divine Savior for light to acquire a better knowledge of His spirit, and for fervor to be penetrated by it. We shall direct our special attention to three points: to *the command* to flee, to *the flight* itself, and to *the return* from Egypt.

I. The Command to Flee

1. Consider why our Divine Savior wished to flee. It was to suffer still more and to practice poverty more strictly. The loving care of St. Joseph had made the stable somewhat homelike, the good

shepherds had brought little presents, and the wise men from the East by their gifts had in a degree alleviated want; but that was too much for our Divine Savior. Therefore away to Egypt, into a foreign land, to endure still greater wants. What love of poverty! He wished to flee to teach us an important lesson. In our wants and needs we should not claim, nor even desire, any supernatural and miraculous assistance from God so long as the natural means at our disposal are sufficient. If you are dangerously ill, you may indeed have recourse to God for supernatural help, but only by way of petition and with resignation to His holy will, when the natural means for recovery have been exhausted. In difficult and doubtful cases we must first apply the means we have at hand, then ask the advice of the spiritual director or other experienced men. If these do not suffice, we may have recourse to God, to help us in an extraordinary manner. Our Divine Savior could easily have helped Himself by a miracle; but the natural and humiliating way of flight was still open to Him, and this He chose.

2. Consider what *sacrifices* this command called for. Flight is in itself distasteful and bitter; to leave home, to go to a strange and unknown land. And add to this that meanwhile, for a considerable length of time, St. Joseph had to do without the earnings upon which he depended as foster-father of the Child and Mother. The uncertainty, the darkness of the future —" and be there until I shall tell

thee" (Matt. 2, 13) — were hard for the Holy Family without means.

3. Consider also a few special circumstances of this command. It came directly to St. Joseph, and through him to Mary. She felt it no offence to her honor and rank because the angel did not come first to her, although she was nearer to the Child than St. Joseph. There was question of the will of God, and it was the same to the handmaid of the Lord whether the knowledge of His will came to her immediately or through someone else. Here is a salutary lesson for us, who are so sensitive, when we imagine we have not been duly considered. The command came at night, at an unseemly hour, during sleep. God knew the wicked intentions of Herod, and could have made His will known by day. But He chose the most inconvenient time. Why? To give us in St. Joseph an example of heroic obedience.

II. The Flight into Egypt

1. Admire the *punctual obedience* of St. Joseph. He makes no objections; he does not ask: "Why flee into Egypt where I do not know any one? Why not go to the wise men in the East, who would receive us with joy? Or why flee at all?" God could, indeed, easily have helped in another way. Yet in that very night St. Joseph rises at once and with a heavy heart wakes Mary who needed sleep. God calls; that was enough for him to obey at once.

"He arose and took the child and its mother by night."

2. How *difficult the flight* was we have seen from the reasons already given. Add to this that travelling with a little helpless child was very difficult for the mother. The way, too, was uncertain and not easy.

3. But what consoled them, what comforted them?

a. The thought — it is *the will of God;* and that will they esteemed above everything.

b. The thought — our *heavenly Father watches* over us, guides and directs us.

c. The thought — it is *done for Jesus* to save His life; and for doing that no sacrifice was too great for them, no effort too much, no suffering too severe.

d. The thought — *Jesus is with us.* The consciousness of this sweetened everything for them. One look at the dear little infant Jesus, and fatigue vanished and hardships were forgotten. With this fourfold thought we also should try to console ourselves in our sufferings and little crosses.

III. The Return from Egypt

1. Meantime Herod, carried away by jealousy and craving for power, determined to commit a crime which stands alone in history,— to murder innocent children. If passion is not resisted in the beginning, it carries one blindly along with it and is

deterred by no crime. Hence the remark of the pagan poet: "Principiis obsta, sero medicina paratur."

2. Consider that all human wisdom avails nothing against the decrees and providence of God. Herod had devised everything cunningly to destroy the new-born Savior, but all to no purpose. Let us trust in the providence of God, because without His permisssion not a hair of our heads shall be hurt. "The very hairs of your head are numbered." (Matt. 10, 30) Whatever God permits is for the best. "To them that love God, all things work together unto good." (Rom. 8, 28)

3. Despite all precautions, death soon put an end to the reign of Herod. He promised himself decades of years, but the vengeance of God soon overtook him.

4. Mary and Joseph waited with patience and resignation in a strange land, until the angel came with the glad tidings: "Arise and take the child and his mother, and go into the land of Israel." (Matt. 2, 20) Let us persevere in patience and resignation under the crosses which the Lord sends us, because He wills it, as long as He will it, and as He wills it. May the dear little infant Jesus breathe His spirit into us, that after His example we may submit to trials, practice patience, and persevere as long as He wishes.

SPIRITUAL READING

Allow me to place before your eyes the picture of a holy man which St. Luke, or rather the Holy Ghost, painted in connection with the birth of our Divine Savior. Let us reproduce it in ourselves, because it shows us the example of a true servant of our Divine Savior. It is a picture of the holy man Simeon, who at the presentation of the little Infant Jesus appeared in the temple. The evangelist points out at least seven excellencies. (Luke 2, 25–29)

1. He praises him for his *justice:* "And this man was just." In this word *just* lies the essence of all the virtues, for only he is truly just whose life is the adequate and complete expression of the law of God, by which human life is regulated and gauged.

2. He was a "*godfearing*" man, penetrated with that childlike fear of God which flees even from the least venial sin as from the greatest evil.

3. In what were his intentions, his hopes, his expectations centered? Not in riches, not in honors, not in pleasures, nor in a comfortable life; he was "waiting for the consolation of Israel." Such should be the hopes and desires of a true Christian and of a zealous priest,— not for the goods of this world, but for the greater honor of God, for the propagation and growth of the Church, for the salvation of souls, for the hereafter. "For we have not here a lasting city, but we seek one that is to come." (Hebrew. 13–14)

4. "And the Holy Ghost was in Him." Thus should the disciples of the Lord, the true Christians and especially the priests of God be filled with the Holy Ghost, and not with the spirit of the world. This spirit of God he must take unto himself by confidential intercourse with our Divine Savior in meditation and the worthy reception of the sacraments.

5. Owing to his confidential intercourse with the Holy Spirit Simeon had received an answer from the Holy Ghost that he should "not see death before he had seen the Christ of the Lord." What a consoling revelation! May the Holy Spirit enlighten us also and guide us in all our important resolves so that we, too, can say with the Psalmist: "Thy justifications are my counsel." (Ps. 118, 24) Not the wisdom of the flesh nor the principles of the world shall guide and determine my way of acting, but the principles or our Divine Savior, the inspiration of the Holy Ghost, supernatural motives. "Thy justifications are my counsel."

6. "And he came by the Spirit into the temple." Let us not appear before God in the temple distracted, excited, full of worldly thoughts and sentiments, but recollected, full of reverence and devotion. This is according to the admonition of the Holy Ghost. "Before prayer prepare thy soul, and be not as a man that tempted God." (Eccl. 18, 23) Let us behold how Simeon finds Jesus in the temple, the fulfillment of his most ardent desire. With

what tenderness and love he enclosed Him in his arms and reverently kissed Him! We almost feel like envying the holy man. But we are better off than he was. He had the happiness of enclosing Jesus in his arms but once; we can receive Him as often as we wish. He could take Jesus into his arms only; we may take Him into our hearts. O that when receiving Holy Communion, we had something of the faith, the reverence and devotion which this holy man had!

7. And he lived so that he could say in the evening of his life: "Now thou dost dismiss thy servant, O Lord, in peace." Would that *we* could say these words on our death-bed! We may appropriate them if we have lived as faithful servants of the Lord, have made His will the rule of our lives, and sought the glory of God in everything. If holy Simeon could do this under the old law, we should the more eagerly strive to do it, because in the New Testament we live in the fullness of grace. Let us often hold this picture of holy Simeon before our eyes, to be edified by it and encouraged in our zeal.

V. CONSIDERATION:

THE HIDDEN LIFE OF OUR LORD AT NAZARETH

After the return from Egypt the Holy Family repaired to Nazareth and there for many years led

a hidden life. Very little is reported about it, but that little is very instructive. Let us go in spirit to that modest little home and learn from it as from a model to regulate and sanctify our own home lives. For if as priests we are leading lives ever so much occupied and are very often in touch with the outer world, there are still many hours which we must reserve, that our public life may become full of blessings. To this quiet life we can with good reasons apply the words of the Holy Ghost: "With all watchfulness keep thy heart, because life issueth out from it." (Prov. 4–23) Indeed, after his public work is done, the priest should withdraw to collect his thoughts and gather strength and courage for new work, to devise plans of new undertakings for the honor of God, carefully to consider before and with God his sermons and the other affairs of his calling. It is therefore most useful to follow closely the quiet life of our Divine Savior and thereby sanctify our home life. Note a fourfold lesson from this consideration:

I

First, the words of St. Luke about our Lord's hidden life are of great value: "Jesus began to do and to teach." (Acts 1, 1) The Son of God came, not only to save the human race by His sufferings and death, but also to teach by word, and especially by example, because examples have a greater effect than words. Hence He devoted thirty

years exclusively to the apostolate of example, and but three to oral teaching. What an important lesson, especially for priests! If the priest wishes his labors to be full of blessings, he must not overlook this good example, because:

1. Example very much strengthens the effectiveness of preaching.

2. He whose conscience does not reproach him will speak with greater conviction, with more energy, and more forcibly. How can you require of others to do what you do not do yourself? "Physician, heal thyself." (Luke 4, 23)

3. If we priests give a good example, the excuse is taken from the faithful that we ask more of them than we do ourselves or they can do. Let us examine ourselves, therefore, whether we do not ask of others and force upon them what we ourselves refuse to do. Before each sermon we ought diligently practice what we recommend from the pulpit or in the confessional.

II

The second important lesson which the Lord teaches us from Nazareth is that sanctity and Christian perfection do not consist in extraordinary, brilliant, and striking works, but in actions which are possible to all without exception. This is the fulfillment of the will of God, which everyone can do in his state of life. We may with full authority pre-

suppose that our Divine Savior led a holy, meritorious, perfect life, indeed a divine life at Nazareth, for to this time also must be applied His words: "For I always do the things that please him." (John 8, 29) But there He worked no miracles, delivered no brilliant speeches, did nothing extraordinary, nothing which everyone else could not do. From this we rightly conclude that sanctity does not consist in doing something extraordinary. What great things did Christ do that His life was so perfect? He did the will of His Heavenly Father, even in the smallest things. Therein, therefore, consists sanctity of life. And there is no will holier, no will more perfect than the will of God; and hence he does a great, a perfect thing who does the will of the most High. Everyone can do that in the state of life which God has marked out for him: rich and poor, healthy and sick, master and servant. What a consoling doctrine! I can lead a holy, a perfect, a godlike life so easily in my state. Therefore I must pray: "May Thy will be done on earth as it is in heaven."

III

At Nazareth perfect order reigns. At a fixed hour they rise, say their prayers, and set to work. A frugal mid-day meal interrupts this, followed by work again in the afternoon. The day closed with prayer, and after a necessary refreshment and spir-

itual converse, they retire to their well-deserved rest. Here we shall learn to love, appreciate, and observe order.

1. God loves order. Look at the works of God! What a marvellous order reigns throughout creation! Miracles are the only apparent exceptions, and these are few and far between. And as the regularity of nature excites within us admiration, so too does a harmonious and well-regulated life give edification.

2. Order gains time; time is precious for eternity. Therefore it is of the greatest importance to follow a fixed order of the day by assigning to every hour an occupation or definite pursuit. This also cuts off the indecision "of what to do now, and what later on." Save yourself this time, and you will go to your task more quietly and with greater determination.

3. Order helps to preserve peace and quiet of mind. Body and soul, the inner and the outer man, are intimately united. When there is a storm in the interior, the excitement will manifest itself exteriorly, and vice versa. Exterior quiet and order has a beneficial effect on the interior life. Indeed a well-regulated way of living preserves and promotes health.

Let us make much of a prudently regulated order of the day, in which everything is well divided,—prayer, work, and recreation. It is true that a man, especially if he is not a religious, can not always ad-

here strictly to predetermined order, especially if he has much work on hand. Still a servant of God who loves order can always get some kind of order even into what is seemingly a chaos. At least we should follow a *threefold rule:*

a. Our occupations should not be ruled by our moods, but by reason enlightened by faith.

b. First attend to what is necessary, then to what is useful, and lastly to what is pleasant. Do not begin with the latter and neglect the former.

c. Do not postpone spiritual exercises to the last and most unsuitable hour, when one is tired, weak, and sleepy.

d. If it has not been done already, an outline of one's daily order should be made during these days of recollection. Observe this order as strictly as possible, for God's blessing rests on order.

IV

Our Divine Savior led a very laborious life at Nazareth. He often went to rest in the evening thoroughly wearied. Why did He lead such a laborious life,— He who was omnipotent, and whom legions of angels would have served willingly?

1. It was to recommend and *ennoble* labor. Man is born to work. He comes into the world helpless, without knowledge, without skill, but gifted with force and fitness to be made use of. We read in Job: "Man is born to labor and the bird to fly." (5, 7) And what can become of a diligent, busy,

active man. Think of the artists, the scholars, and the other great men of the world, what they have made of themselves by work. Men as a rule dread work, especially menial work; it is too irksome, too hard. To urge them on, to take away every excuse, the Son of God Himself worked.

2. He worked to become *like* unto us in everything except sin. God had said to Adam and his descendants: "In the sweat of thy face shalt thou eat bread" (Gen. 3, 9), and as this precept in some way applies to all, rich and poor, master and servant, He wished to sumbit to it. Often He literally ate His bread in the sweat of His brow. There is no harm in asking ourselves sometimes at table: "Have I really earned this meal?" How severe the saying of St. Paul on this subject: "For also when we were with you, this we declared to you: that if any man will not work, neither let him eat." (II Thess. 3, 10) Since our Divine Savior so scrupulously subjected Himself to this order, we poor creatures and sinners must be industrious.

3. The more so because *idleness* is the root of all evil. If we are not industrious but shirk labor, we shall be seeking entertainments. "And the people sat down to eat and to drink, and they rose up to play" (Exod. 32, 6), but in so sinful a manner that they drew the anger of God down upon themselves.

4. We should be industrious, for thus we can do

penance for our past sins; and to do this we are in duty bound. Work gives us a double advantage. (1) By the exertion which we willingly take upon ourselves to make reparation for the errors of youth, we will shorten our purgatory, and (2) merit a heavenly reward.

5. While the duty of being diligent according to the example of our Lord binds all men, diligence is recommended in an especial manner to the priest, because of the good *example* he is bound to give to his parishioners. It edifies the faithful, who are usually compelled to work hard, when they see that their pastor also works, and find him at work whenever they visit him. He must be industrious in order not to assist the calumny that priests and religious are given to idleness. Far from us be this dishonorable reproach!

However, before we leave the dear little home at Nazareth, we shall briefly consider how Jesus worked, to learn from Him the art of working.

a. Whatever He did, He did *well;* and this the people candidly attested by saying: "He hath done all things well." (Mark 7, 37)

b. Whatever He did was done *willingly,* not with a murmur and complaint, but in order to fulfill the will of His Father.

c. By prayer, by a pure intention, and by offering His works up to His Father, He made them all a *prayer.*

'd. He worked so that His work did not take Him from prayer; and He prayed so that prayer did not take Him from His work. Hold to this model and sanctify your work.

Richly laden with this *fourfold* lesson of Nazareth, we shall now return to our own homes and shall pray to our Lord and Savior to give us plentiful graces to walk in His footsteps and follow His doctrine faithfully.

XV. MEDITATION:

THE VISIT OF THE HOLY FAMILY TO JERUSALEM

The hidden life of our Lord at Nazareth was simple and uniform. We read nothing of excursions, entertainments, vacation-trips, or other elaborate amusements. He passed His time in prayer and work. The law prescribing a pilgrimage to Jerusalem for the great holidays brought a little change every year. St. Luke (2-41) tells us of such a pilgrimage when Jesus was twelve years of age. After their devotions in the temple, Mary and Joseph began their journey homeward, but Jesus remained in Jerusalem without their knowledge. As they thought that He was with their relatives, they were not troubled by His absence; but at the end of the day when they could not find Him after an anxious search, they returned to Jerusalem.

Here they found Him sitting in the temple in the midst of the doctors, who were astonished at His wisdom and His answers. His mother said to Him: "Son, why hast Thou done so to us? Behold Thy father and I have sought thee sorrowing." And He said to them: "Did you not know that I must be about my Father's business?" And He went with them, and came to Nazareth.

We shall divide this meditation into *three* parts: The *going* to the temple, the *remaining* of the Savior in the temple, Mary and Joseph *seeking* Him and *finding* Him in the temple.

I. The Journey to Jerusalem

Consider the *fidelity* of St. Joseph in keeping the law, although it called for no little sacrifices from him; the grand example of our Divine Savior, who, as law-giver, was not bound by the law, yet did not exempt Himself, as He wished "to be like unto us in all things except sin"; the *zeal* of Mary, who, though under no obligation, did not wish to be wanting where there was question of God's honor. With what *recollection* and devotion they travelled! It was no pleasure-trip, but a real pilgrimage of prayer, silence and many privations. Observe with what reverence they enter the temple, with what fervor they pray, with what heartfelt *devotion* they make the prescribed offerings. Consider the *sentiments* which filled our Divine Savior, Mary and Joseph at their appearance before the Most High, and how

long they persevered there in prayer until finally the time came for them to return. Let us dwell upon this touching sight for our edification.

II. The Loss of Jesus

With a heavy heart Mary and Joseph turned away from this sanctuary, which they had not at Nazareth. But our Divine Savior, at the bidding of His Heavenly Father, remained in the temple without letting His mother and foster-father know, although He foresaw their sorrow. But when God calls, human consideration must be set aside, and we must not consult flesh and blood; we must make sacrifices. Our Divine Savior remained there unconcerned about a night's lodging, which perhaps He found on the hard stones in one of the porticos of the temple; unconcerned about eating and drinking, for most likely He took no nourishment during these three days.

Consider furthermore how our Divine Savior withdraws even from good and pious souls without a fault of theirs, to their great sorrow. He withdraws sometimes in *punishment* for venial sins, because of *sloth* that has crept in, because of too great *attachment* to creatures, with whom He does not wish to divide His rule. And sometimes He withdraws, but for no fault whatever, as in the present case. Neither Mary nor Joseph was to blame that the Child remained behind. Why does the Lord withdraw even from holy souls so that they

do not perceive His presence and feel entirely abandoned and disconsolate? It is to try them; to give them opportunities for many good works, and to ground them more and more in virtue.

III. The Finding of Jesus

When Mary and Joseph met after their return from their visit to the temple, to their great sorrow they did not find Jesus. What sorrow did not the departure of the Boy cause? They go to seek Him at once. At first they search for Jesus among relatives and acquaintances, but they do not find Him. So too, if the Lord withdraws from us and takes away His consolation, we shall not find Him among creatures, among flesh and blood, and in entertainments. We must go back to Jerusalem, to the temple, have recourse to the tabernacle; there in prayer we shall find Jesus the Lord, our lost consolation.

What *modesty* does not our Divine Savior manifest? He could have put the Scribes to confusion and made His superiority felt, but He did not step out of the rôle of a boy and only asked and answered questions. Let us take to heart the significant words He spoke to Mary: "Did you not know that I must be about my Father's business?" That should be the programme of the priest. He should be intent on the honor of God, which he should ever have before him in his works, which he should try to promote everywhere.

After our Lord had complied with the extraor-

dinary command of His Heavenly Father, He returned to the quite hidden life of Nazareth.

We learn from this event the grand motto of our Lord and Master: "Did you not know that I must be about my Father's business?" Having made it our own, let us ask our Divine Savior for light, grace and strength to follow it faithfully and to make it effective in our lives.

SIXTH DAY

THE STANDARD OF JESUS

"If any one wishes to come after me, let him deny himself." (Matt. 16, 24)

"We have left all, and have followed thee." (Matt. 19, 27)

"The servant is not above his master. If they have persecuted me, they will also persecute you." (John 15, 20)

XVI. MEDITATION: THE TWO STANDARDS

There is still much to be learned from the life of our Divine Savior, but time will not permit us to consider all the events thoroughly. That may be the matter of our meditations during the year. We are now going to make a meditation which is especially well adapted to render us familiar with the spirit of our Divine Savior, and to expose to us the seductive spirit of the evil one; to impel us to follow the former and to guard us against the latter. This is the well known meditation on the *Two Standards:* the standard of Jesus Christ, and the standard of Satan.

We shall represent to ourselves first, our Divine Savior in the open country about Jerusalem, where He endeavors to assemble men under His standard;

and Lucifer in the city of Babylon, where he pitched his camp and is striving to entice the poor children of men into his trap. We shall pray for the grace to know the snares of the devil, to avoid them, and for light and grace to understand the plans of our Savior, to enter upon them.

To make this meditation with profit we shall divide it into two parts. In the first we shall occupy ourselves with the ringleader of the hordes of God's enemies, in the second with the leaders of the host of God. In each one of these parts we shall have three points of view. We shall first study the character of Lucifer as well as of our Divine Redeemer. Then we shall investigate the plans and stratagems by the use of which the evil spirit entices men to fall; and test the plans and ways on which Christ leads the soul to salvation and perfection. Finally we shall view the execution of the plans.

I. The Two Leaders

a. Holy Writ depicts the evil spirit as the *prince of darkness* (Eph. 6, 12; Col. 1, 13) and the father of lies. (John 8, 44) As such he deceives and confuses, stirs up dust so that one cannot see, awakens doubt, leads to unbelief, and brings on fickleness of character. Wherever we notice these traits, there is the smoke of hell and the evil spirit is at work.

b. According to Holy Writ he is a *peace-disturber,* who sows cockle (Matt. 13, 25) and the seeds of discord. As such a turbulent being he causes unrest,

excitement, tears hearts asunder and shows a restless and violent demeanor. Where that is to be found, there the smoke of hell is rising and the evil spirit is in the background.

c. He is the *prince of hell,* where despair is prevalent. Hell is "a land of misery and darkness, where the shadow of death, and no order, but everlasting horror dwelleth." (Job 10, 22) As prince of hell, he causes sadness, discouragement, despondency, makes the heart to ache and then leads to despair. Where this frame of mind is prevalent, there is the smoke of hell, and there breathes the evil spirit.

d. He is the *rebel,* who from the beginning of the world rose up against God and through whom the spirit of revolt invaded paradise and now pervades the whole world. As such, he naturally urges men on to stubbornness and obstinacy, awakes in them pride, and drives them to insubordination and rebellion against authority. Where such fruits ripen, the smoke of hell is noticeable; there the evil spirit has already gained a considerable influence.

How different is the physiognomy of our *Divine Savior,* how lovely He appears in the light of the Gospel!

a. He is the true *Light.* "I am the light of the world." (John 8, 12) As the light, He enlightens and transfigures everything, broadens the view, clears the sky, and produces serenity. In that soul

in which the sky is serene, which looks at all things in a supernatural light, which is entirely filled with the light of faith, there breaks the spirit of Jesus Christ.

b. Jesus by preference calls Himself the *Son of man*, and as such He comes forward most unassumingly, most condescendingly, and most mildly. He is cordiality itself. Condescension, mildness, cordiality are manifestations of the spirit of Jesus Christ. Where we find these, we can easily conclude that it is His Spirit.

c. Christ is our *Savior*. "Thou shalt call His name Jesus," said the angel to Mary in announcing His birth. As Savior He expands the heart, sets men free from the bonds of sin, from the chains of passion and from the snares of the world; and inspires them with courage and confidence. When one, even after mortal sin, rises quickly, does not lose courage, and confidently betakes himself to the feet of the Savior to seek forgiveness and reconciliation, there moves the spirit of Christ; there one can exclaim with Martha: "The Master is here, He calls you." (John 11, 28)

d. Jesus is the *Prince of Peace*. Among the names of the future Emmanuel the Prophet Isaias also mentions this one. And indeed He came to bring peace with God, with your neighbor, and with yourself. As Prince of Peace He calms, comforts, pacifies. If therefore we feel within ourselves a true peace, elevated above the storms of passion, and

if a friendly disposition suffuses our exterior, then we may conclude from this that the spirit of Christ dwells within us.

The spirit of Jesus Christ is stamped upon the lives of the saints, whereas the spirit of the evil one marks the wicked. The satellites of Satan are proud and full of conceit in appearance; arrogant and bold in speech; vehement and boisterous in manners; dark in expression of countenance and repulsive toward others, especially hard and heartless towards the poor. They are real types of the hellish spirit! The saints are in appearance modest and unassuming; in their intercourse with others friendly and loving! A heavenly peace suffuses their exterior; innocence and purity of heart beams forth from their eyes; cheerfulness transfigures their whole being. Here it will be well for us to test our exterior and our manners, to see whether we are entirely penetrated by the spirit of Jesus Christ, or whether there is not something of the breath of the evil one upon us.

II. The Plans

1. In a council of war, which he holds with his partisans, Lucifer unfolds the following plea. Awaken in the hearts of men a *love*, an attachment, and a passion for earthly goods. When they are once engrossed by worldly riches they will run, work and *strive* for *them*, forget heaven and things eternal, and neglect the salvation of their souls. Having

met with some success, they become *conceited,* look down upon others, seek for flimsy honors and esteem, and then become ambitious. When they have compassed distinction, they are captured by *pride:* and no sooner has pride obtained the mastery of the heart of men than they will take no advice, submit to no authority, however sacred, and they will make light of every commandment. Thus the way is cleared to *self-deification,* and the evil spirit is implicated in our rebellion against God. The way to it therefore is *avarice, ambition,* and *pride.*

2. What plan does our Divine Savior unfold? He teaches His disciples and friends to warn people not to become attached to earthly things, but to be ever mindful of the fact that " we have not here a lasting city, but seek one that is to come." (Heb. 13, 14) We are wanderers and pilgrims, and it is foolish to become altogether absorbed in earthly things which death will surely snatch away, and to forget things eternal. They should instruct us how dangerous it is to pursue creatures that lead us away from God and our eternal destiny, and should always insist that " Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven." (Matt. 5, 3) This poverty in spirit is the first step in the following of Christ on the road to perfection. When this is attained, it will be easier to renounce worldly honors, and to be indifferent to abuse and contempt. When one has come thus far, the fear of God will gain the upper hand, and with it real humility.

Where humility rules, all the other virtues thrive. The way then to Christian perfection is *poverty* in spirit, *contempt* of the world, and *humility*.

III. Execution of the Plans

1. We shall now examine how the prince of darkness, to carry his cunningly devised plan into effect, sends his spirits into every land and into all places. No one can escape their promptings and temptations. They are bent on carrying out the orders given them so eagerly that St. Peter warns the faithful: "Be sober and watch, because your adversary the devil, as a roaring lion, goeth about seeking whom he may devour." (I Pet. 5, 8)

It is sad, indeed, to see that thousands and thousands of men give themselves up to the devil as his assistants and tools to found and spread his kingdom upon earth, to plant his standard everywhere, and to entice their brethren into his net. These aiders and abettors are more dangerous than the evil spirit himself. They make use of every imaginable weapon, science, power, astuteness, seduction, threats and enticements. They are always on the alert and work indefatigably for the ruin of souls, sparing no effort or sacrifice. And of the terrible results the history of the world is an evident attestation. How successful the craftiness of the evil spirit is! What a scramble, what a striving and chasing after things of this earth! Avarice and greed dominate the ways and doings of men. What

plans of ambition do they not pursue in all things! How pride, emancipation from God, and self-deification of human society has increased!

We must be on our guard. If we are priests, or religious, or at least souls striving after perfection, the devil will mark us for his victims. But he will not attack us as openly and bluntly as he does the children of this world; if he cannot make us fall, he will be satisfied to divert us from striving after perfection. He will, therefore, endeavor to lead us away to *sensuality,* to comfort, and to attachment to creatures because thus we become less useful instruments in the hands of God, neglect many things that we could easily do, and work less zealously for the salvation of souls. He will induce us to have a high opinion of our talents and ability, to be prepossessed in our own favor, and consequently to seek preferments and places of honor, to feel easily slighted and offended, and to become jealous of others. If he succeed in this, our zeal for souls shall have been spoiled and we shall belong to those of whom the Apostle says: "For all seek the things that are their own, not the things that are Jesus Christ's." (Phil. 2, 21) He will tempt us to take many liberties by which we withdraw ourselves from the restraint of obedience, emancipate ourselves and become wilful. And thus pride is nourished and the striving after real virtue and the following of Christ are undermined.

2. Let us, on the other hand, cast a glance at Christ. He sends His disciples into all the world to spread and carry out His programme. During the course of centuries a countless number of noble souls have attached themselves to Him, and by word and example they invite us to become animated by the spirit of the Lord and follow Him. Their virtues, their activity, their burning zeal, will edify us, and we too shall enlist under the standard of the Lord. The zeal of His enemies will spur us on to remain true to Him and to carry out His directions courageously.

Since we have become acquainted with the spirit and strategy of the evil spirit, and on the other hand with the spirit of our Divine Savior, His plans and views, we should, with the help of Mary, appeal to Jesus to shield us from the spirit and protect us from the snares of the evil one, to fill us with His own spirit and make us partakers of His sentiments.

XVII. MEDITATION: CHOOSING OF THE APOSTLES

After our Divine Savior had begun His public life as teacher, He thought of choosing disciples to spread the kingdom of God. We shall consider 1. the act of *calling* itself; 2. for *what purpose* the Lord called his Apostles; 3. the *directions* He gave them for their calling.

I. The Calling of the Apostles

1. We must first of all consider the seriousness with which He began this selection. St. Luke (6, 12) reports it thus: "And it came to pass in those days, that He went out into a mountain to pray, and He passed the whole night in the prayer of God." He, who could not act without wisdom and deliberation, does not begin His business without prayer,— fervent prayer, long prayer,— in order to teach us not to enter upon any important undertaking without having asked for light from above, and to consider our desires and resolutions in prayer before God. We shall consider how the Lord, in that solemn hour, made selections for the centuries to some. In that night His look of grace also fell upon me. He thought of me. Relying upon this fervent prayer, I may hope for grace for my high calling, for perseverance in it, and for an abundance of blessings on my labors.

2. *What kind of men* did our Divine Savior choose for His Apostles? *Poor, untutored men*, mostly from the lower classes of the people. And why? To show us that He does not depend on nor stand in need of human accomplishments; that His work, the conversion of the world, is not the result of eloquence or prudence, nor the effect of power, respectability or wealth of those who first announced the Gospel, but solely the work of grace. In this His decree has the significance which St. Paul

describes in these words: "But the foolish things of the world hath God chosen, that he may confound the wise; and the weak things of the world hath God chosen, that he may confound the strong; and the base things of the world, and the things that are contemptible hath God chosen, the things that are not, that he might bring to nought the things that are, that no flesh should glory in his sight." (I Cor. 1, 27, 29) He chose His Apostles from the lower walks of life to honor them, since apart from that they would be despised by the world; and to admonish us priests not to neglect this class of people, and not to give our entire attention to the educated, the respected, and to young ladies.

3. We shall consider the grace of vocation: "You have not chosen me, but I have chosen you." (John 15, 16) Let us thank the Lord for deigning to cast His look of grace upon us in preference to thousands of others; and let us not imagine that we are doing God a favor when we take holy orders, that we are indispensable or cannot be replaced. God has no need of us; God can raise children to Abraham out of stones. (Luke 3, 8) Experience, too, shows that for men who seemed irreplaceable others just as good, and perhaps even better, were raised up to continue their work.

4. Among the chosen twelve there was one who became unfaithful to his vocation. Let us learn from this that with the grace of vocation not everything is given. Even if, relying upon this grace,

we can expect an abundance of others, yet we must not be without solicitude. We must earnestly cooperate and be on our guard, "lest perhaps, when I have preached to others, I myself become a castaway." (I Cor. 9, 27)

5. Let us be edified at the willingness with which the Apostles followed the call of the Lord, leaving all they possessed and could hope for: "Behold we have left all things and followed thee" (Matt. 19, 27), as Peter testified in the name of his brethren. Happy we if we correspond to the call of God in like manner.

II. Purpose of the Call

To *what* did the Lord call His Apostles? To this question we find a fourfold answer in the Gospels.

1. "That they might be with him." (Mark 3, 14) Above all, the Apostles and their successors should be on intimate terms with our Divine Redeemer by meditation, by frequent visits to the Blessed Sacrament, and by frequent reception of Holy Communion. They should, in union with His labors and sufferings, work for the salvation of their neighbors, enter upon His views and intentions, upon His wishes and plans, and be to Him pliable instruments for His cause, one with Him in every respect.

2. "I have chosen you, and have appointed you, that you should go and bring forth fruits and that your fruit should remain." (John 15, 16) He chose you as priests, "that you should go," not to

idle, but to work; to bring forth fruit, not in passing, not to fan a fire of straw, but to bring forth enduring fruit, in school, in the confessional, in the pulpit.

3. "I will make you to be fishers of men." (Matt. 4, 19) Hereby Christ presses upon the attention of His Apostles the qualities their vocation calls for. As fishermen they must not be afraid of fog and rain, cold and wet, but they must be mortified and hardened, must have patience and endurance, must not be frightened by want of success, must be prudent and clever.

4. "As the Father hath sent me, I also send you" (John 20, 21), *i. e.*, to spread the kingdom of God, for the salvation of souls; hence to work and not to rest, not for earthly joys and honors, but for privations. As I walked in the way of the cross, so must you, too, be prepared for suffering, for crosses, for persecutions, for calumny and for bitter ingratitude. "Remember my words that I said to you: The servant is not greater than the master. If they have persecuted me, they will also persecute you." (John 15, 20)

III. Duties of their Calling

For brevity's sake we shall emphasize but a few of the many excellent instructions which the Lord gave to His Apostles.

1. He tells them what to do: "Heal the sick, raise the dead, cleanse the lepers, cast out devils." (Matt. 10, 8) This the Apostles were to do, first in a

literal sense, but then in a spiritual and much higher sense; and in this sense it is even now the calling of the priest. But if they really wish to heal the sick souls, their own soul must not be sick; if they wish to raise the sinner to life, they must themselves be in the state of grace, and not dead in the eyes of God; if they wish to cleanse the souls entrusted to them from the leprosy of sin, they must themselves be free from it; and how can they be confident in trying to banish the devil from others, when they themselves are subject to him? How subdue the passions of others, when they themselves are slaves of their own passions?

2. Our Divine Savior gave them the subject of the sermons which they were to preach: "And going, preach, saying: The Kingdom of heaven is at hand." (Matt. 10, 7) The task of the priest should be to lift up the people entirely sunk in the things of earth, and direct their look to the things of heaven. It happens, alas, but too often that men become absorbed in the cares of the body. In greed for money and earthly things they neglect the soul, forget heaven and keep their eyes fixed on the life here below. These poor creatures should often be admonished that with all their care for the temporal they must not forget the eternal; that according to the beautiful prayer of the Church, "we should so seek temporal goods that we do not lose the eternal." (3d Sunday after Pentecost.)

3. Our Lord tells his Apostles, and therefore the

priests: "Freely have you received, freely give." (Matt. 10, 8) Since the Lord has been generous to them in conferring such great and supernatural powers, therefore they too must be generous in making use of their powers willingly and zealously for the benefit of the faithful. In this they are to have in view no temporal advantage, neither the praise and recognition of men, nor the pursuit of honors and reputation, but solely the honor of God and the salvation of souls. If, by the zealous exercise of the powers which the Lord gave them, they are honored and win the recognition and love of the people, which certainly is desirable and advantageous, this should serve only as a means to an end, to make their labors the richer in blessed results; for when the pastor is beloved and honored by his people, his instructions and admonitions will be the more fruitful. "Freely you have received, freely give."

In conclusion, let us thank the Lord for the inestimable grace of calling us to the priesthood, and be deeply impressed with the duties connected with it. May the directions which our Savior gave us for the use of its powers be our guide in using them for His honor, and upon this use may He also deign to bestow His blessing which, in that memorable holy night, by his fervent prayer, He obtained in rich measure for all whom He had chosen for the priesthood.

SPIRITUAL READING:
THE THREE DEGREES OF HUMILITY

In the little book of the Exercises the frequent consideration of the three grades or steps of humility is recommended, because it is very well adapted for us to learn thoroughly the condition of our soul. We shall make it the subject of this spiritual reading.

I. The First Grade of Humility

This grade, or the entire subordination to God in all things, consists in this, that from having a low opinion of ourselves and a high esteem of God we are ready to lose all earthly goods and submit to all temporal suffering rather than break a strictly obligatory commandment of God. This degree is the lowest, and absolutely necessary for salvation. Without it we would not even be able to receive the Sacrament of Penance worthily. Have we that degree? We hope so. How often do we not tell our dear Lord that we are ready to die rather than to commit another mortal sin! But we have every reason to entertain a wholesome fear, because, notwithstanding our good will and good resolutions, we may in grievous temptations, amid great dangers and seductive occasions easily fall, as so many examples teach us. We must remember that the angels fell in heaven; that our first parents fell in paradise; that David, a man according to the heart of God,

fell; that Solomon fell, even though endowed by God with extraordinary wisdom; that Peter fell, though he had earnestly averred, "Yea, though I should die with thee, I will not deny thee" (Matt. 26, 35); that Judas fell, who for three years had dwelt near our Lord. And many others have fallen whom we ourselves have known. We, too, have every reason to fear when we consider our own weakness and inborn inclination to evil (Rom. 7, 5), through which we have fallen so often; and when we bear in mind the snares and efforts of the evil spirit (I Peter 5, 8), who even assumes the form of an angel (II Cor. 11, 14) to lead us astray. To preserve this necessary degree of humility, we must make use of the means recommended by our Lord,— *prayer* and *vigilance*,—"Watch ye, and pray that ye enter not into temptation" (Matt. 26, 41); *flight* from danger; *humility*, for *pride* goeth before the fall.

But we must not stop at this grade of humility; we must strive for something higher, especially as priests and religious who are to set a good example to the laity. To us in particular are addressed the words of our Lord: "You shall be holy for I am holy." (I Peter 1, 16) And the more so since we can scarcely maintain this necessary grade of humility if we do not strive for higher perfection.

II. The Second Grade of Humility

This consists in being indifferent to, and actually making no distinction between, temporal things, as

honor and dishonor, wealth and poverty, so long as the honor of God be equally attained by using or not using these creatures. Hence, simple indifference of the will constitutes this grade, but conditioned by the glory of God as the only object we have in view, and to which everything must be made subordinate. With this, too, is connected the disposition of the will not to commit a deliberate venial sin for any consideration.

Have we attained this degree? How easily we are deceived if we look at our good resolutions and trust our frequent confessions. But whence the many relapses into venial sin? Why our many complaints when adversity strikes us, when the Lord is in earnest and takes us at our word, when He sends us humiliations, privations and sufferings? Whence that craving within us, which rules us completely, for honors, comforts, and worldly joys? Whence this dread of sacrifice, mortification, and self-abnegation? Are we striving with all our strength to submit to the will of God? For it is *self-evident,* on attentive consideration, that this is *necessary* if we would remain in the first degree. "He that contemneth small things shall fall little by little." (Eccl. 19, 1) However, we must strive for a still higher perfection.

III. The Third Degree of Humility

This degree does not stop at indifference to poverty or riches, honor or dishonor, but, provided

the honor of God claims nothing else, actually decides in favor of that which the Savior chose as His portion, that is, poverty, shame, and suffering. What a grand, noble, and exalted disposition of the soul! To come to such a conclusion the following motives should persuade us:

1. The *love* of our dear Divine Redeemer. Indeed, we promised Him, "I will follow thee whithersoever thou goest."

2. The *conviction* that whatever the Lord, who is wisdom itself, chooses, is the best, the most perfect, and will be the most useful for us.

3. The *example* of the saints, who were encouraged and drawn by the example of our Divine Savior, and entered upon this road, seeking, loving, and choosing poverty, contempt and suffering.

4. Even the example of the children of this world, who in their love of a human being, as of a child or a bride, or in their hopes of temporal gain or passing reward, even for carrying out their evil intentions, make great sacrifices, lead a very troublesome life, and take upon themselves great hardships. Think of the soldier, the miner, the railroadman. Their lives are often harder than the mortified life of the penitent in the desert or of the members of the strictest religious orders.

5. Glance at the *reward* given, not only in the hereafter, but already in this life. There ensues even here below, as a result of such a disposition of mind, a peace which the world does not and

cannot give, and a joy of the kind which the Apostles experienced when they had been scourged. "And they indeed went from the presence of the council, rejoicing that they were accounted worthy to suffer reproach for the name of Jesus." (Acts 5, 41.) "I am," declares St. Paul, "filled with comfort; I exceedingly abound with joy in all our tribulation." No wonder that such souls have a taste of joy, in fact, are filled with joy; they are even now elevated above the things of earth, and can say with the Apostle of the gentiles: "But the things that were a gain to me, the same have I counted loss for Christ. Furthermore I count all things to be but loss for the excellent knowledge of Jesus Christ my Lord." (Phil. 3, 7)

6. The *blessing* which rests on them for such a disposition of mind, and on the labors for the salvation of the souls of others. Truly Apostolic men are indeed apt instruments in the hands of Christ. They prefer sacrifices, self-denial, and suffering. They do not seek themselves, but the greater honor of God. Hence we see the real followers of our Divine Savior on the way to the cross rendering great service in the conversion of sinners.

Let us strive after this exalted degree of humility, and by the help of Mary and the Sacred Heart of Jesus implore God to elect and elevate us to it, for it is indeed the highest perfection to which sanctity can lead, the most complete following of the

Lord. To prepare ourselves by degrees for this grade, let us resolve:

a. Not only to *avoid* all mortal sin — this is self-evident — but also *venial sin,* and the very *shadow* of sin.

b. *To make good use of* the daily opportunities for mortification and self-denial; to become accustomed to bear patiently rebukes, slights and humiliations.

c. We will *strive* to do well whatever we do: "In all thy works keep the preeminence." (Eccl. 33, 23)

d. We will *endeavor* to be faithful followers of Christ.

e. We will *purify* our intentions, that the reproof may not be fixed upon us which St. Paul utters in the following words: "For they all seek the things that are their own; not the things that are Jesus Christ's." (Phil. 2, 21)

VI. CONSIDERATION:

THE THREE CLASSES OF MEN

To obtain a better knowledge of the condition of our soul, let us study three kinds of men or servants of God, and ask ourselves to which class we belong. There are cold, lukewarm and fervent servants of God, or as one might say, there are some who are

really no servants of God at all except in name, others who are such only by halves, and again others who are wholly servants of God.

I. The First Class

The cold servants of God, in case they are priests, wear the priestly robes, but there is in them no trace of priestly sentiment. The principles of the world rule and guide their judgment; they are not penetrated by the sentiments of our Divine Savior. They strive for comfort, honors, dignities, prestige and praise, not for the greater honor of God and the salvation of souls. They have a passion for entertainments and amusements, but dread self-denial and mortification. Spiritual exercises not binding under mortal sin they neglect. If, for some reason or other, they do attend spiritual exercises, they may indeed make some good resolutions, but without permanent results. There is no earnest endeavor to reduce them to practice, for old customs and long established habits choke the sprouting seeds, and the planter's labor, like a fire of straw, lasts but a short time.

How sad the condition of such a cold servant! What a contradiction between the cloth and the life, between the calling and the sentiments, between duty and deed! It will certainly make itself felt in the interior, in the soul, in the conscience. It will not let true peace and joy spring up, for such a servant is unfaithful to his Lord and his God, he is a hypo-

crite before men, he is empty and worthless to himself.

II. The Second Class

This comprises the *lukewarm* servants of God. The lukewarm priest, it is true, does his duty according to the letter, but he does it mechanically, without spirit and life, without a higher incentive; he lives at random, without an ideal grasp of his exalted state and noble calling. Enthusiasm for the cause of God and the interest of the church are unknown to him, he does nothing more than his duty. His motive is not pure love and filial fear, but servile fear and hope of reward; often, too, but earthly consideration. If he takes part in spiritual exercises, he arms himself with every possible principle lest they may press him too hard. He says to himself, I am not a religious, hence I need not take the various instructions so strictly; I am satisfied if I get to heaven; I am not looking for the first place; I am no fanatic, etc. If God urges him to make a sacrifice and asks of him something special, he turns to treat with God, to make terms, to lessen the demand of God, and to make the will of God conform to his will, and thus to divide the sacrifice into halves.

This frame of mind is unworthy of a servant, of a priest of God. This *lukewarmness* we must carefully avoid. We should avoid it:

1. Because our Divine Savior so positively op-

poses it: "I would that thou were cold or hot; but because thou art lukewarm, and neither cold nor hot, I will begin to vomit thee out of my mouth." (Apoc. 3, 15, 16)

2. Because so slothful a service of the infinitely great Lord God is rather like unto *contempt* or negligence than fit for reverence and worship.

3. Because through this foolish negligence such a one *loses many graces.* God's blessing is not upon his labors, and he will enjoy but little or no fruit from the work of his ministry.

4. Because there can be no true joy and contentment in a lukewarm and languid life; neither from above, for such a service is a real abomination in the eyes of God; nor from the world, to which one is not willing to give himself up entirely. Everything becomes difficult for the lukewarm servant of God. He groans under the weight of the duties of his calling; for as a locomotive without fire cannot drag along a freight-train, so without fervor everything in his calling becomes difficult. He does not experience the truth of the words of Christ: "My yoke is sweet and my burden is light." (Matt. 11, 30)

5. Because such a frame of mind easily leads to mortal sin. Conscience becomes blunt, love of prayer is wanting, the inclination to sensuality becomes stronger, the influence of the world and of the evil spirit increases, God withdraws; and it takes but one unguarded moment, an enticing opportunity, a violent temptation to bring about a fall.

III. The Third Class

Let us rather turn to the edifying example of the *fervent* servant and priest of God. He is all aflame with love. He deems it his greatest honor and glory to live, work and suffer for God and our Divine Savior. He is prepared for everything: "My heart is ready, O God, my heart is ready." (Ps. 56, 8) "Speak, O lord, for thy servant heareth." (I Kings 3, 9) "Lord, what wilt thou have me do?" (Acts 9, 6) Hence he does not barter with God or prescribe the limit of His demands, for he is mindful that "God loveth a cheerful giver." (II Cor. 9, 7)

At work he is always cheerful and merry; and since he knows that in serving his neighbor he serves our Divine Savior Himself, he is obliging and courteous to others. The motive of his actions are filial fear and love of God, heartfelt gratitude; and with such motives as these he is ready willingly to make sacrifices to our dear Lord and to do more than he is obliged to do.

We shall try to belong to this class of the servants of God. Many motives for this present themselves to us:

1. The *pleasure* of God, who is well pleased in such servants.

2. The *blessing* of God, which is upon them and their work.

3. The *peace* and interior joy which they experi-

ence. They realize in themselves the words of Christ: "For my yoke is sweet and my burden is light."

4. The *dignity* and the sublimity of God. In view of the infinite majesty of God, we can lawfully apply to the most fervent service we render Him the words of the preface of holy Mass: "Truly it is meet and just, right and profitable."

5. The *glorious* example of so many holy servants and priests of God ought to encourage us in this. What an honor to work at their side and after their example for the glory of God and the salvation of souls! "I am a partaker with all them that fear thee, and that keep thy commandments." (Ps. 118, 63)

6. *Gratitude* ought to urge us on to this, for what do we not owe to God? For even were we to spend ourselves entirely in His service, we cannot pay the least part of the debt we owe him.

7. In fine, we shall cast a glance at the *reward* promised to the faithful servant. The more zealously I serve Him, the more generous He will be; for according to St. Paul, "He who soweth sparingly, shall also reap sparingly; he that soweth in blessing, shall also reap in blessings." (II Cor. 9, 6)

Far, therefore, be from us all coldness and lukewarmness in the service of God. Let us be zealous, *whole-hearted:* a cold, lukewarm, half-hearted servant of God is a contradiction. If our heart is so

small and narrow that we dare not divide it between God and creatures, then let it be wholly consumed in the service of the Most High. "Thou shalt love the Lord thy God, with thy whole heart, and with thy whole soul, and with thy whole mind, and with thy whole strength." (Mark 12, 30)

XVIII. MEDITATION:

THE SUFFERING OF OUR LORD IN THE GARDEN OF OLIVES

Our Divine Savior declared: "If any man will come after me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross daily, and follow me." (Luke 9, 23) Without the cross there is no following of Christ. As we have promised, "I will follow thee whithersoever thou goest" (Luke 9, 57), we must be ready for the cross. But sensual nature is opposed to that, and strenuous efforts are required to become brave and submissive to crosses and sufferings.

To acquire the right disposition toward the cross which we must carry with Christ, the most useful means is a loving study of our Savior's passion. For this purpose we shall now take as the subject of our meditations some of the details from the history of our Lord's sufferings; and to make these exercises more fruitful for us, we should:

a. Not direct our attention, as in the preceding method, to the persons, to their words, to their ac-

tions; but we must try to realize *the pain* which our Savior endured in its extent and its intensity.

b. Consider that our Lord's *divinity withdraws* itself, which could so easily have nullified these sufferings, and exposes His humanity to endure them all, as it were, without protection.

c. Remember that our Lord endured all this suffering *for me.*

To what, then, am I in duty bound to my Savior? As an *introduction* to each meditation we shall recall the subject as recorded in the Gospel, representing everything vividly to ourselves; and we shall ask our Savior for a profound knowledge of His sufferings and for heartfelt sympathy, since it is for our sins He underwent all this suffering.

Let us this evening go with our Lord to the *Garden of Olives* and meditate 1. on His *going* into the garden; 2. on His *agony;* 3. on His *betrayal.*

I. His Entrance into the Garden

1. Let us consider how our Savior, having said a hymn and thus finished the last supper, went forth into the Garden of Olives. So we, too, must finish our meals by saying grace.

2. He does not betake Himself to a well deserved rest after His work and the long instructions which He gave to His Apostles, but to prayer, and that too, "according to His custom." (Luke 22, 39) How this puts us to shame who seek rest so soon after our work! He betakes Himself thither with

such an unbroken perseverance that Judas, who was looking for an opportunity to carry out his intended betrayal, could find none more certain than this laudable custom of our Lord to go late in the evening into the garden to pray.

3. Although our Savior foresaw the contemptible abuse which Judas would make of his knowledge of this beautiful custom and the dreadful consequence of His adhering to this pious practice, He nevertheless did not omit it on this memorable night. How different are we who for every little difficulty and for every insignificant motive break off a good usage or custom!

4. With what a mastery over Himself our Savior proceeds, surrounded by His disciples, who had no idea of the terrible sufferings that were now impending! A holy earnestness, it is true, manifests itself in His bearing, but He was perfectly calm, condescending, and full of love for them.

5. Having arrived at the Garden of Olives, He left eight of His disciples behind, at some distance from the place of His agony, solicitous about their safety, that they might more easily save themselves from the approaching enemy. Thus the Lord takes into consideration our imperfections and saves us from greater sufferings.

6. He takes His three favorite disciples with Him; for He wishes them to be witnesses of the beginning of His Passion. The nearer we are to our Lord, and the more confidential our intercourse is

with Him, the more will He let us participate in His sufferings. Therefore sufferings are a sign of His predilection for us.

II. The Agony of Our Lord

Having arrived in the Garden of Olives, "Jesus began to grow sorrowful and to be sad." His sorrow and sadness became so intense that He "was sorrowful even unto death." He passed into an agony, and the cold sweat of death was upon Him; yea, and what was till then unheard of, He sweated blood. Ah, let us sympathize with our Lord in His agony and ask ourselves: Why was our Lord so sorrowful, sorrowful even unto death?

1. This sadness was *natural*, because every living being dreads its own destruction. And this dread of death is the more natural, the more perfect the being is, and the clearer and the more certainly death stands before its eyes. And since the human nature of our Divine Savior was, in truth, a masterpiece of the Holy Ghost, He foresaw, even unto the smallest detail, all the terrible sufferings which with a raging madness were now to break in upon Him. It was quite natural then that an agony should come upon His human nature. And for this special reason these sufferings were not rejected but endured, because for our consolation He desired to become like unto us in all things except sin, and to give us an example to accept sufferings submissively and to endure them patiently.

2. Why was our Lord at that hour so sorrowful that he fell into an agony and sweated blood? Because He saw Himself *laden* with the sins of the whole world, for which He was to make atonement. The clearer He saw the malice of sin and the more ardent His love for His heavenly Father was, the greater was His unspeakable sorrow and the more intense His pain, because of the numberless offences committed against God by ungrateful humanity.

3. He was depressed and sorrowful even unto death, because He saw that, despite His suffering and death, an uncountable number of men would perish, and that His blood would be shed for them in vain. He foresaw the lukewarmness with which we respond to His love, the coldness and ingratitude with which so many come to meet Him. This gave Him infinite pain — Him who yet could ask us: "What is there that I ought to do more to my vineyard, that I have not done to it?" (Isa. 5, 4) What more shall I do or suffer for your salvation that I have not done?

4. He was sorrowful at that hour, yea, sorrowful unto death, because He foresaw all the sufferings that were to come upon His disciples, His faithful servants, and His church, His mystical body (Eph. 1, 23), until the end of time. As a mother takes it to heart when she sees her child in pain, so our Divine Savior on that evening endured in spirit the persecutions and cruel torments which the Church and its martyrs were to endure in the course of cen-

turies. That our Lord, as the head of His mystical body, is not indifferent to the persecutions and sufferings of His Church and its members, we see from His words addressed to Saul (Acts 9, 4): "Saul, Saul, why persecutest thou Me?" Saul was persecuting the Christians and did not even think of Jesus; but Jesus as mystical head considered that persecution as directed against Himself. Hence that deep depression and sorrow that befell Him in the Garden of Olives.

What does Jesus do in that dreadful hour? He takes refuge in *prayer,* to give us an example that, in the sad hours when fear and distress are upon us, we too should seek consolation, courage and strength in prayer. We shall now go to the school of our Divine Savior and learn how to pray. How did our Jesus pray?

1. He prays with *reverence:* "He fell upon his face." (Matt. 26. 39) If the innocent, the only-begotten Son of God appears before his heavenly Father with such reverence, how should we miserable sinners appear before Him, who are but dust and ashes?

2. He prays with *fervor.* For to this hour especially these words of St. Paul must be referred: "Who (Christ) in the days of his flesh, with a strong cry and tears, offering up prayers and supplications to him that was able to save him from death, was heard for his reverence." (Heb. 5, 7) If our Lord with tears and a strong cry prays and im-

plores to be heard, we must not flatter ourselves and believe that a lukewarm lip-prayer will make our prayer ascend from the bottom of our heart to God. "Out of the depths I have cried to thee, O Lord." (Ps. 129, 1)

3. He prayed a *long time,* one hour, and another, and a third hour. Can we expect to be heard at once after saying a few "Our Fathers"? Perseverance makes prayer forceful and effective. If the Lord had to hear us at once after every little prayer, we would think less of the favor obtained, lose it more easily by our folly, and become lax in working out our salvation.

4. He prays with *resignation:* "My Father, if it be possible, let this chalice pass from me. Nevertheless, not as I will, but as thou wilt." (Matt. 26, 39) We must not dictate to God when and how He shall hear us. Penetrated by the conviction that the will of God is the holiest, the best, the most useful for us, our actions will be not only perfect, but also for our own interest, provided we entirely submit to God's will and say with Jesus: "Not as I will, but as thou wilt."

5. He prays and *does not neglect* His duty. The heavenly Father has intrusted Him with the care of His disciples. Our Divine Savior is not so engrossed with sadness and fear as to forget His disciples. Once, twice, and even a third time He interrupts His prayer, visits them, admonishes and instructs them: "Watch ye, and pray that you enter

not into temptation." (Mark 14, 38) How often do we not let grief and afflictions so overpower us that we neglect our duty and fail to give to others the attention and consideration due to them?

Such then should be the characteristics of our prayer. A *reverential, fervent, persevering, submissive,* and *obedient* prayer will certainly be heard. But it seems our Divine Savior was not heard; the chalice of suffering was not taken away; He had to drink it to the last drop. But yet it is not so. Our Divine Savior *was* heard, and His prayer was not fruitless. True, the heavenly Father did not take away the chalice; but Christ was so strengthened by His prayer that all fear and sadness vanished; that He met His enemies with courage and determination; that He endured all His sufferings with heroic firmness, and by the sacrifice of Himself consummated the work of our redemption. Thus, too, will *our* prayers be heard. Either God will give us what we ask, if it be for His honor and our salvation, or He will give something else more conducive to our salvation, that with patience we bear our crosses, courageously make sacrifices, and with meritorious submission be resigned to His holy will. Therefore we shall pray with confidence.

III. The Betrayal

Meanwhile the enemies of our Lord drew near, the bailiffs and soldiers with Judas at their head.

What a contrast! A few hours ago in the circle of His disciples at the last supper, and now in what surroundings! At the approach of the mob our Lord rises from prayer, all fear and trembling having disappeared, and speaks to His disciples: "Rise, let us go: he is at hand that will betray me." (Matt. 26, 46) Judas gives the sign which had been agreed upon: "Whomsoever I shall kiss, that is he; lay hold on him and lead him away." (Mark 14, 44) What a treacherous kiss, like unto an insidious stab with a dagger! How bold and blind sin makes us! Let us take to heart the touching words of our Divine Savior: "Judas, dost thou betray the son of man with a kiss?" (Luke 22, 48) Does not this bitter reproach in some way touch me also? Now the bailiffs fall upon the lamb of God the more unsparingly because Judas had warned them: "Lead him away carefully" (Mark 14, 44), that he may not escape. No wonder Peter, enraptured with love for our Lord, grasped his sword to defend Him; but Jesus in His meekness and patience tells him to sheathe his sword, and full of kindness heals the ear of the servant. (Luke 22, 51) But it hurt our Lord that they treated Him so rudely. "You came out as it were to a robber with swords and clubs to apprehend me. I sat daily with you teaching in the temple, and you laid not hands on me." (Matt. 26, 55) And "then the disciples all leaving him, fled." (Ib. 56)

We will not leave our Divine Savior. With heartfelt sympathy we will accompany Him on His sad journey into the city, and not leave without a rich gain from the Garden of Olives, where He gives us so grand an example of virtue.

SEVENTH DAY

THE SCHOOL OF THE CROSS

"God forbid that I should glory, save in the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ." (Gal. 6, 14)

"O all ye that pass by the way, attend and see if there be any sorrow like my sorrow." (Jer. Lam. 1, 12)

"He loved me and delivered himself for me." (Gal 2, 20)

XIX. MEDITATION:

CHRIST BEFORE VARIOUS TRIBUNALS

Our Divine Savior, for His greater humiliation, is dragged by His enemies in triumph from tribunal to tribunal,— from Annas to Caiphas, from Caiphas to Pilate, then to Herod, and back again to Pilate. Everywhere He suffered beyond measure. We shall treat His suffering from three points of view, considering how painful, how humiliating and how unjust it was. Let us pray to the Lord for heart-felt sympathy and for the grace to bear our sufferings patiently for love of Him.

I. Our Savior's Pains

The sufferings of our Lord were very great.

1. Call to mind his flagellation. It was extremely painful, because His body was a perfect organism,

vigorous, in the prime of life; because our Lord was already exhausted from His previous sufferings and exertions; because it lasted so long, and was inflicted in a malicious rage. It was only the diabolical wish to see Christ die on the cross which kept the savages from doing their worst, this devilish leniency keeping our Savior from succumbing then and there to the great forces of the blows.

Consider, moreover, that while the scourging was the immediate work of His torturers, you, by your sins, were the immediate cause of it. As many sins as you have committed, so many stripes did you inflict on the Innocent Lamb.

2. Still more painful was the crowning with thorns. It caused him excruciating torments and lasted until death; for it seems the crown of thorns was not taken from His head. The soldiers pressed the thorns on His head, but you, by your sins, were the immediate cause of it. By each and every bad, impure, revengeful, and idle thought, which you entertain, you press a thorn into the sacred brow of our Divine Redeemer.

II. Our Savior's Humiliation

The pain inflicted upon our Lord *grieved* Him intensely, because it wounded the tenderest feelings of His Sacred Heart. We shall mention only a few of the sufferings which caused this intense grief.

1. Think of the *ingratitude* which our Lord experienced. This ingratitude was bitter, because the

Divine Heart's intentions were *so good,* because He did *so much,* and was *ready* to do still more; now He reaps nothing but *hatred.*

2. Think of the *denial* coming from one of His *disciples,* from *one most favored,* and in such a *cowardly* manner.

3. Call to mind the *betrayal,* coming also from a *disciple,* a betrayal so *hypocritical,* for the *trifling sum* of thirty pieces of silver, to *deadly enemies.*

4. Take into consideration the gross *calumnies* that were spread against our Lord, who had the best reputation everywhere in the land, among all the people; and these calumnies were about things which He most despised, such as blasphemy, and that, too, without any proof.

5. He who belonged to the royal house of David, was made the object of the most stinging *mockery* and derision by people of *all* classes and conditions in life, by the cultured and by the common people, in every imaginable way, as only *diabolical* wickedness could suggest.

If a drop of this suffering causes such severe pain in us, so that we can not forget it for weeks and years, how painful must it have been for our Lord when a whole ocean of sufferings rushed in upon Him?

III. The Injustice of Our Savior's Sufferings

The sufferings of our Lord were not only painful and humiliating but *unjust.* Strong souls bear up

bravely even under the greatest punishments if they are conscious that they deserve them; thus the poor souls in purgatory. But suffering becomes exceedingly painful in noble souls when it is unjustly inflicted. Our Divine Savior is justice itself, and yet He is treated without the *least consideration.* Even the greatest criminals are protected against the outrages and excesses of the rabble, but everything is permitted to be said and done against Christ. No one takes His part or defends Him, and in spite of the *contradictions* of the witnesses, He is declared guilty of death. The most notorious *criminal* then in prison in Jerusalem is preferred to Him. Although Pilate declares Him innocent: —" I find no cause of death in him " (Luke 23, 22),— Christ is condemned to *death,* and that to the most cruel and the most ignominious death of the *cross.* How offensive to the Savior was not such a treatment under such circumstances! If ever a shadow of such an injustice should strike us (and more than a shadow can scarcely strike us), we shall for the love of Jesus bear it with resignation. The Lord permits it, not only because of our sins, but that from our own experience we may get a taste of the bitterness of His suffering, and thus be enabled to meditate the better and with more compassion on His agony. If we never met with anything of the kind, we could scarcely divine what our beloved Redeemer had suffered.

Leave this meditation with a heartfelt sympathy

for Jesus, who, for thy sake, took upon Himself all these sufferings, all these humiliations and wrongs; and with the firm resolution to bear willingly and patiently all the sufferings which He sees fit to have us endure. The weaker we are on this point and the more our sensual nature rebels against it, the more we will ask Him, through the intercession of the Mother of sorrows, for the grace to live up to our good resolutions.

XX. MEDITATION:

CONDEMNATION OF CHRIST

Despite all his efforts, Pilate does not succeed in quieting the turbulent enemies of our Lord; but contrary to the clear voice of his conscience, he gives way and condemns Him, innocent as he admitted Him to be, to the death of the cross. The Jews urge the immediate execution of the sentence. Then Christ is laden with the cross. It was fear that forced them to get help for Him, lest He should succumb under the heavy weight of the cross, and they would not have the satisfaction to see Him die on the cross. Hence they forced Simon of Cyrene to help our Lord. Having arrived on Mount Calvary, they nailed Jesus to the cross.

We shall divide this material into *three* points: The *condemnation* to death on the cross — the *carrying* of the cross — the *nailing* to the cross.

I. The Condemnation to the Death of the Cross

How much we find here to be considered to our advantage!

1. The *indecision* of Pilate. Since the heathen governor was aware of our Lord's innocence, he was favorably inclined to our Savior and intended to save Him; but undecided as he was, in order not to lose the good will of the men, he applied only half-measures, and thus instead of helping our Lord, did but increase His sufferings to an extent which even His enemies had not planned to inflict on Him. Hence the galling *examination* of our Lord before Herod, and the subsequent *mockery;* hence the *mortifying contrast with Barabbas;* hence the painful *flagellation;* hence the *public exhibition* of our Lord with the words: *"Ecce homo,"* Behold the man.

2. Pilate, in his indecision, again seeks a way out of his difficulty. Since the people had the right to obtain at the Paschal time pardon for a certain criminal, Pilate avails himself of this opportunity. He seeks the greatest criminal in Jerusalem's prison and gives the people the choice between Jesus and Barabbas, trusting that they will give the preference to Jesus. How mortifying this contrast was for Jesus! If a saint, an angel, or even the Blessed Virgin herself had been in opposition to our Lord, the contrast would have been humiliating for Him. And what happened? The whole crowd cried out

unanimously: "Away with this man (Jesus) and release unto us Barabbas." (Luke 23, 18) What a disgrace! A common criminal is *solemnly* and *publicly* preferred to Him when there is question of *life* or *death,* and by the *whole people* whom He had overwhelmed with benefits. A little and perhaps not undeserved slight hurts us so much; how keenly must not the Son of God have felt the ignominious slight put upon him?

3. The *insatiate rage* of passion. The Jews in their jealousy of Jesus ought to have been satisfied with having successfully apprehended Him, for now they had Him in their power. But that does not satisfy passion. Jesus must be morally annihilated. He has lost His good name and His respectability in the eyes of the people; He is looked upon as a false prophet, an impostor, a blasphemer. But that is not enough for passion; it is satisfied only when His enemies see Him die on the cross. Let us resist the beginnings of passion; to yield is to increase its power.

4. The *blindness* of passion. Pilate imagined he cleared himself of all guilt by washing his hands; therefore he said: "I am innocent of the blood of this just man; look ye to it. And the whole people answering said: His blood be upon us and our children." (Matt. 27, 24, 25) What an awful judgment did not this people conjure down upon itself! Think of the siege and destruction of Jerusalem, of the sad lot of the Jews, of their hard-

heartedness continuing to this day. Passion blinds. With eyes closed, it hurls the sinner into hell.

5. The *injustice* of Pilate. Although Pilate has several times solemnly declared our Lord's innocence, he nevertheless condemns Him to death, without good reason, against his conscience, in spite of the warning received from above through his wife. And why does he condemn our Lord? Because he heeded the excited rabble. How often do we act against the voice of our conscience, against our better knowledge, against the admonition of God, because we listen to the rabble of our passions, to the voice of the flesh, of the world, and of the evil spirit.

6. *Ingratitude* of the world. What do the people offer in gratitude to our Lord who loved them so much, overwhelmed them with benefits and came to save them? The cross! Let us not expect a reward from men here on earth for our efforts in their behalf. It will come only in the hereafter, from God, who will never forget our endeavors and sufferings.

II. The Way of the Cross

The cross is now put upon our Lord's shoulders, and the way of the cross begins. Oh, how hard this way of the cross was for our Lord! It was hard:

1. Because the cross itself was *heavy;*

2. Because *all the sins of the whole human race* were added to its burden;

3. Because our Lord was *already considerably*

weakened by the loss of blood and want of sleep, and by being dragged hither and thither from one tribunal to another;

4. Because the way was *rough* and steep;

5. Because the soldiers handled Him rudely, pushed, pulled, and struck Him;

6. Because *no one* took His part or offered Him a helping hand, and many gloated over His misfortune, or going along with Him were cold and without sympathy;

7. Because He met those who were near and dear to His Heart, among them His beloved Mother, whose pain grieved Him intensely.

No wonder, then, that He fell one, two, and even three times under the burden of the cross. That He might not expire under the load and they forfeit the pleasure of seeing Him die on the cross, His enemies looked for assistance and forced Simon of Cyrene to help our Lord.

Let us penetrate further into this *school of the cross*, and meditate how Jesus carried the cross.

1. He accepted the cross, not from the hands of the Jews, but from the hands of *His Beloved Father,* as we learn from His words to Peter: "The chalice which my Father hath given me, shall I not drink it?" (John 18, 11)

2. He carried the cross *patiently.* "He shall be led as a sheep to the slaughter, and shall be dumb as a lamb before his shearer, and he shall not open his mouth." (Is. 53, 7) Whence this patience?

Precisely because He took the cross from the hands of His Father. Had He taken it from the hands of the Jews, it would have become heavy. He would have had reason to complain and murmur. Mark the difference! A look up *to heaven* makes the cross light; a look *down to earth* makes it difficult. We can give an apt explanation of this from an incident narrated in the Second Book of Kings, chapter 16, v. 5 sq. David had to flee from his ungrateful son, Absalom. On his flight Semei met him, and taking advantage of the helpless condition of the king, began to curse and to throw stones at Him. No wonder the attendants of the king drew their swords to defend him. But David said: "Let him curse." Whence this difference in the disposition of mind of David and that of his attendants? David looked up to heaven and recognized in Semei's rebellious conduct God's permission and providence: "The Lord hath bid him curse me: and who is he that shall dare say why hath he done so?" The attendants of the king looked only upon the man: and it undoubtedly means a rebellion when a subject curses his monarch. Let us therefore fix our eyes not so much upon the human being who offends and hurts us, for then it will surely hurt, but rather upon God who permits it, and then we shall bear it more easily.

3. Our Divine Savior carried the cross because of our *sins:* let us carry our crosses patiently, mindful of the sins for which we deserve them.

4. He carried the cross *up to Calvary* and died on it: let us persevere under the cross even on our death-bed: let that be our Calvary.

Since the Lord said: "If any man will come after me, . . . let him take up his cross daily, and follow me" (Luke 9, 23); and mindful of our promise to follow Him ("I shall follow thee whithersoever thou goest"), we will take up our crosses great or small and carry them after the example of Christ. Which are our crosses? To say it briefly, everything which befalls us that is in any way irksome, wearisome or unpleasant to bear is a cross. To this belong the afflictions of body and soul, difficulties arising from our calling, from the weather or surroundings, from vexations and calumnies, etc. And if our crosses become very heavy and all but crush us, let us cast a glance on our leader Jesus Christ who precedes us, and then institute a comparison between His cross and our crosses, which are but mere splinters of His, between His innocence and our guilt, between His patience and our impatience. This look will strengthen us, dispel our impatience, console and encourage us, so that, for the love of Jesus, we will carry our little crosses with fortitude, since He took His heavy cross upon Himself for the love of us. We will the sooner become disposed to carry our crosses willingly because by our impatience we only make our Lord's cross heavier for Him, whereas by patience we make it lighter. Why? Be-

cause we must bear in mind that all our crosses are but mere splinters of the cross of Christ which He distributes among His servants. We should indeed be partakers of His cross. If then we carry patiently the part of His cross which He has assigned to us, we lighten His cross for Him. In fact we suffer with Him, and share in the enviable task of Simon of Cyrene who helped our Lord to carry His cross. But when we are impatient and try to shake off the cross, then we throw the splinters, so to speak, back on the cross of our Lord and say to Him, not in so many words, it is true, but by our deed: "*You* carry it; it is too much for me." Far be from us such cowardice!

We shall now consider the grand crusade which our Lord opened. Thousands in the course of centuries have joined it, led by the Apostles, the martyrs, the hermits, the penitents of the desert, the founders of religious orders with their countless number of followers, many holy confessors, priests and bishops, noble virgins and pious widows, and in our own days the many devoted bands of missionaries. We must look upon it as an honor to be permitted to be in the ranks of this host. Then, filled with holy enthusiasm, let us cry out to each other in the beautiful words of the *Imitation:* "Come, then, my brethren, let us go forward together; Jesus will be with us. For the sake of Jesus we took up this cross; for the sake of Jesus let us persevere in the cross. He will be our helper who

will be our captain and forerunner. Behold our king goes before us, and he will fight for us. Let us follow Him like men; let no one fear the terrors of the fight; let us be ready to die valiantly in battle; and let us not strain our glory by flying from the cross." (Bk. 3, Chap. 56, n. 5)

III. The Crucifixion

After much toil and many hardships, and amid untold pain and suffering, caused by carrying the beam of the cross, for His shoulders were raw and sore, the sad procession arrived on Calvary. Having been stripped of His clothes, our Lord was nailed to the cross. By order of the executioner He stretches forth His hands, which otherwise were opened only to confer blessings. Hark to the thumping of the hammer with which the most holy hands and feet of our Lord are nailed to the cross! Hark to the villainous yell with which His enemies greet the exaltation of the cross and the consummation of their malicious plot! Contemplate our Divine Savior entirely submerged in pain, and hearken to the tender words: "O all ye that pass by the way, attend, and see if there be any sorrow like unto my sorrow." (Lam. 1, 12)

We will not leave Calvary without this heartfelt prayer to Mary:

> Those five wounds on Jesus smitten
> Mother! in my heart be written,
> Deep as in thine own they be.

Through Mary let us ask for the grace of a fervent and heartfelt sympathy for Him "Who loved me, and delivered himself up for me" (Gal 2, 20); and ashamed, let us ask ourselves: What has Jesus done and suffered for me, and what have I done for Him? May this meditation on the cross awaken within us patience, the spirit of sacrifice, and fortitude, and to remain true to the crucified for all eternity. O Jesus, grace and mercy!

VII. CONSIDERATION:

THE FAVORITE VIRTUES OF THE SACRED HEART OF JESUS

During the Spiritual Exercises it is not possible to consider thoroughly all the magnificent examples of our Savior's virtues, but we will, for our own edification, pay especial attention to His Sacred Heart, which is the center and fountain-head of all those virtues which distinguish Him. We wish to be reminded of it all the more today because it was the Sacred Heart which evolved the plan of our redemption that terminated in the passion and death of our Lord. This Heart gave the blood with which we were redeemed; it tasted the most bitter pains itself, and by its burning love transfigured the sacrifice of the cross into a sublime holocaust. All the virtues and affections of this Heart, it is true, were perfectly holy; but we can nevertheless bring

a few into prominence which claim a certain pre-eminence over others. We may call these the favorite virtues of the Divine Heart. They are especially three: The Sacred Heart was *generous* towards God, *humble* in itself, *sympathetic, i.e.* merciful, towards us.

I. The Generosity of the Sacred Heart

Generosity shows itself by *sacrifice.* The Divine Heart made the *most precious* and the *most bitter* sacrifice, and that, too, in a *most unselfish* manner.

1. It made the *most excellent,* the *most precious* sacrifices.

a. It offered up its *liberty* by most perfect obedience, not only to its heavenly *Father,* but also to *creatures,* to Mary and Joseph, to *unworthy* temporal and spiritual superiors, even to its enemies. Christ was obedient *all his life,* in things that brought Him no *honor,* as well as in the *most trying* circumstances; for "He was obedient unto death, even unto the death of the cross." (Phil. 2, 8)

b. The Sacred Heart offered up all earthly wealth and *splendor,* reputation and worldly honors, comforts and pleasures. Indeed, our Divine Savior was always poor and led a mortified and hard life from the manger to the cross.

c. The Sacred Heart offered its *life* and its *blood,* to the very last drop, amid *untold* sufferings.

2. It offered the most *sensitive* and the bitterest sacrifices:

a. Its *good name.* Our Divine Savior was looked upon by the people as a just man, a messenger of God, a wonder-worker. But a few days ago he was led in triumph into Jerusalem, and the people shouted hosanna; now He is condemned to death and nailed to the cross as an impostor and blasphemer. He is morally *annihilated* in the eyes of the *entire* people.

b. A common *criminal,* a murderer, is preferred to Him and pardoned, whereas Jesus is destined for the cross. In this his enemies proceed by the most *revolting* injustice. They could not prove any charge against him; Pilate and Herod are convinced of his *innocence;* but in spite of all, He must die, and the Jews glory in his death.

3. This heart offers its sacrifices in a most *unselfish* manner: for

a. But a *little* suffering would have been sufficient for a perfectly valid satisfaction for our sins; and for the redemption of mankind an easy death, a little blood, a few tears, or an humble prayer would have been enough. But that would not have so splendidly confirmed His love for His heavenly Father and for us. In its generosity the Sacred Heart wanted more than merely to do its duty.

b. It was *generous* in its sacrifices. It did not look to itself and its own *advantages.* So for love of us it wanted to remain ever with us in the most Holy Sacrament of the Altar.

What must not our Divine Savior take into this

bargain, to carry out His plan! How many irreverences, coldnesses and unworthy communions, because for wise reasons He wants to remain humble, modest, and unnoticed in this Sacrament.

c. In His generosity and unselfishness He left to His Apostles the *success* in preaching and the conversion of numberless souls. Want of success He reserved to Himself: for with His sermons and miracles He did not convert so many as Peter and Paul did, and as so many Apostolic men have done in the succeeding centuries. Truly, the Divine Heart of Jesus was generous.

II. The Humility of the Sacred Heart

The *second* favorite virtue of the Divine Heart was its *humility,* which it recommended to us in a very special manner: "Learn of me because I am meek and humble of Heart." (Matt. 11, 29)

1. We shall consider only how this Heart during thirty years practiced "Love hidden and unknown," and still practices it in a wonderful manner in the tabernacle.

2. Consider how our Divine Savior has *done more* than He has *spoken.* He spoke of Himself in *unassuming* terms, loved to call Himself the Son of man, did not defend Himself when accused, and did not put His enemies to shame when He could easily have done so.

3. Consider how ready He was to be among publicans and sinners and people of the lower classes.

He chose uneducated persons for His constant companions and Apostles; He patiently bore their imperfections, their spiritual narrowness and other faults; He served them so that He could say: "But I am in the midst of you as he that serveth." (Luke 22, 27) Look at Him at the feet of the apostles, even of a Judas, to wash their feet. (John 13, 4)

III. The Mercy of the Sacred Heart

The third favorite virtue of the Divine Heart is His sympathy, condescension, and mercy for us poor creatures. It was this that drew the Son of God down from heaven. "My delights were to be with the children of men." (Prov. 8, 31) How loving was He in His intercourse with the poor and sinners who followed Him in dense crowds, even into the desert, forgetful of everything; so that, moved by compassion, He said: "I have compassion with the multitude, for behold they have now been with me three days, and have nothing to eat. And if I shall send them away fasting to their home, they will faint on the way! for some of them come from a-far off." (Mark 8, 2, 3) Wherever He came He healed the sick and infirm (Matt. 4, 23ff.). St. Peter testified of Him, "(Jesus) went about doing good." (Acts 10, 38) This sympathy for us confines Him night and day until the end of time in the tabernacle, wherever there is but a small number of Catholics, to dwell among us as a shepherd

among his sheep, a father among his children, a fountain-head of salvation, blessing and consolation. In order to convince us of His eagerness to help us, He invites us to come to Him in these consoling and heartfelt words: "Come to me all you that labor and are burdened, and I will refresh you." (Matt. 11, 28)

Let us, then, go to the school of this Heart to acquire *generosity* and a *willingness to make sacrifices* for God. The more generous we are towards God, the more generous we shall find Him to be towards us. There we shall learn that humility which makes us so pleasing to God and draws plentiful graces down upon us. There we acquire that energetic love for our neighbor whereby the real disciples of our Lord are known. (John 13, 35)

May the Divine Heart of Jesus always be for us an example and a wellspring of consolations and blessings!

XXI. MEDITATION: CHRIST ON THE CROSS

This evening we shall ascend Mount Calvary together and, according to the example of St. Paul, give our attention exclusively to Christ. The Apostle writes of himself: "For I judge not myself to know anything among you, but Jesus Christ, and Him crucified." (I Cor. 2, 2) We shall during this solemn hour give our attention to the question,

What is *our dear Divine Savior doing on the cross?* To this question we hear six answers.

I

He *suffers.* He suffers much, *exceedingly.* He is immersed in an ocean of sufferings, and each single suffering is *unfathomable.*

a. He suffers in all His *members,* in His head, in His hands and feet. All His bones are dislocated. "From the sole of the foot to the top of the head there is no soundness therein." (Is. 1, 6) All His *senses* suffer: His eyes, when they look upon His enemies gloating over Him in their seeming triumph; His ears when they hear the scoffing, the blasphemy, and the mocking of the vulgar rabble. On account of the great loss of blood He suffers a thirst great beyond expression, which no one will quench.

b. He suffers from all *quarters.* All have conspired against Him, the *temporal* and the *spiritual powers;* culture, respectability, science; the ancients of the people, the scribes and the Pharisees. He suffers from the *people* He loved so much, who now ignore Him, spurn and revile Him. He suffers from His *friends* and adherents, for no one takes His part; even from His *disciples,* for with one exception, all forsake Him, one even denies while another betrays Him. He suffers because He feels Himself forsaken by *God:* "My God, my God, why hast thou forsaken me?" (Matt. 27, 46)

c. He suffers in every *conceivable manner:* by ingratitude, by betrayal, by calumny, by taunts and sneers. Everything is done to Him that human and diabolical malice can invent. Therefore our Divine Savior suffers exceedingly; "We have seen him, and there was no sightliness; despised and the most abject of men, a man of sorrows, and acquainted with infirmity." (Is. 53, 2, 3)

II

What does our Savior do on the cross? He is *silent* without *complaining:* "He did not open his mouth." He is silent without taking revenge; Elias called down fire from heaven to destroy the men who were sent out to apprehend him, and twice fifty men were destroyed. (IV Kings 1, 9 sq.) Eliseus cursed the boys who came from the city and mocked him, and two bears came out of the forest and tore two and forty of them. (IV Kings 2, 23 sq.) Christ is silent despite the mocking challenge: "He saved others; Himself he cannot save. If he be the king of Israel, let him come down from the cross, and we will believe in him." (Matt. 27, 42) He could easily have put these scoffers to shame, but He did not do it, although He foresaw that his silence would increase their boldness and confirm them in their triumph, and that thereby He would give to many wavering souls occasion to doubt His innocence and His divine mission.

III

What is our Divine Savior doing on the cross? He *prays,* and teaches us to pray. For in death everything leaves us, and no one but God can help us; and in that hour we are in special need of help and consolation, all the more so because then the evil spirits conspire against our salvation.

IV

What is our Divine Savior doing on the cross? He loves us and offers Himself up for us. "He loved me and gave himself for me," because it was for love of us that He died on the cross. The greater the malice of His enemies, the greater is His love; as a fire is hotter when oil is poured into it. On the cross His love for us reaches its climax. He prays even for His torturers: "Father, forgive them, for they know not that they do." (Luke 23, 34) He makes use of the tender name "Father" to make certain of obtaining His request. And for what does He pray? Not for revenge or punishment but for forgiveness. "Them"— He does not mention them by name — the Jews, the enemies, the executioners — in order not to arouse the anger of His heavenly Father. "For they know not what they do"— If ever evil-doers had no excuse, then the enemies of our Lord certainly had none; and yet in His goodness and mercy He finds an excuse. What a lesson for us who are ever ready to find

fault with others, even when the fault might easily be overlooked! And how the Divine Heart overflowed with kindness towards the penitent thief, who, after a life of sin, at the last moment asked for a memento: "When thou shalt come into thy kingdom." Jesus answered: "This day," (not after a year) "thou shalt be with me in paradise." He surpasses all the expectations, even the imagination of the robber. What may *we* then expect, who have served Him for years, and time and again appealed to Him?

V

What does our Divine Savior teach us on the cross? His teaching has a five-fold lesson for us.

a. It is *full of meaning.* He teaches us by His example everything He recommended by word of mouth: every virtue, the eight beatitudes and the evangelical counsels.

b. He teaches all this in the *most perfect* and most heroic manner. Who can think of a more perfect obedience than the obedience which He practiced on the cross? "He was obedient unto death, even to the death of the cross." (Phil. 2, 8) Can I think of a more profound humility than the humility displayed on the cross? "I am a worm and no man: the reproach of men, and the outcast of the people." (Ps. 21, 7) Is there a greater love than the love of our Savior dying for us poor creatures — for His enemies, His executioners, and while expir-

ing still praying for them: "Father, forgive them, for they know not what they do." (Luke 23, 34)

c. Christ's sermon on the cross is *intelligible* to young and old, learned and unlearned, rich and poor; all understand that, if the Son of God was obedient, we also can and must be obedient. If He, who is the Lord of lords, forgave even His bitterest enemies, we also can and must forgive our fellow men. If He in whom there was no sin, suffered so patiently, then we must not complain of our much deserved sufferings.

d. This sermon is *irresistible*. Before the cross every pretext and excuse vanishes. How can we excuse ourselves when we are excitable and irritable if some little thing goes wrong with us, and our Divine Savior from the cross says to us: "See in my great sufferings I do not complain; I am patient and resigned. And you, who have but a shadow of my cross to carry, find no end of complaints? Who will be able to say: I suffer more, I have more ground for anger?" Far from us be such an excuse! Or who will be able to murmur under the cross when obedience asks something hard of us, when Jesus says to him: "See, I was obedient unto death, yes, to the death of the cross, and I am the only begotten Son of God; can you not be obedient in things that are for your own good?" Who will dare say: I am more than He, or they ask of me something more difficult? Every excuse for disobedience is silenced. Are you injured in your

honor and angry on account of it? Go to the cross and our Lord will tell you: "Have you been hurt as I have? I bore my suffering patiently; you also should submit to this trial." Who will answer: This is too hard, I am too much annoyed; I must take revenge? Before His example every thought of revenge must vanish.

e. Christ's sermon from the cross is also *attractive*. We can not refuse the Crucified Redeemer anything; we must submit unconditionally to all He asks of us. Does He ask humility? How can we, who are but dust and ashes, feel offended at this when we see Him, "who is the brightness of his glory" (Heb. 1, 3), on the cross, more like a worm than a man? For the love of our humble Savior the sacrifice of humility will not be difficult. Who will be unwilling to forgive his brother, when our Savior on the cross admonishes him: "For the love of me forgive your brother as I forgave my enemies who were doing me a most infamous wrong?" Who can refuse our Savior this dying request? Thus every sacrifice, every victory over self, and the practice of every virtue, will become not only easy but sweet. We shall not have the heart to deny the Crucified Savior any request. How we come to understand why St. Paul appreciated this sermon so highly that he writes to the Corinthians: "For I judge not myself to know anything among you, but Jesus Christ, and him crucified!"

VI

What is our Savior doing on the cross? He dies. The Son of God dies! No wonder that the sun hid his light, the earth quaked, and the rocks were rent asunder. (Matt. 27, 45, 51)

Why does He die? To atone for my sins. What a great evil is sin, for which the Son of God must shed His blood. For whom does He die? For me. "He loved me and delivered himself up for me." (Gal. 2, 20)

Let us have recourse to Mary:

Those five Wounds on Jesus smitten
Mother! in my heart be written,
Deep as in thine own they be.

In the passion of my Maker
Be my soul a brave partaker,
Weep till death, and weep with thee!

We now return from Mount Calvary with the people that had gathered to see the tragedy. They saw what happened "striking their breasts." (Luke 23, 48) We, too, must strike our breasts in the consciousness of the guilt which has caused these sufferings of our Lord, and ashamed of having had so little compassion with Him, having learnt so little in the school of the cross, and of having done so little for God.

EIGHTH DAY

THE GLORY OF CHRIST

"If you be risen with Christ, seek the things that are above; where Christ is sitting at the right hand of God." (Col. 3, 1)

"But our conversation is in heaven; from whence also we look for the Savior, our Lord Jesus Christ." (Phil. 3, 20)

"I will come again, and will take you to myself; that where I am, you also may be." (John 14, 3)

XXII. MEDITATION:

THE RESURRECTION OF CHRIST

In the meditation on the kingdom of Christ we heard that our Savior was certain of victory and promised a reward to all His followers, according to each one's participation in His undertaking. In order to strengthen the resolutions we have taken, we will now cast a glance at the reward and glory that await us, and which we see realized in our Lord. The prospect of a rich reward strengthens a man's courage for great sacrifices and difficult tasks. We shall not, as in the former meditations, turn our eyes to the persons, their words, and their actions, but to enrich the contents of this meditation we shall dwell on the transfiguration of the human nature of our Lord. See how the divinity now transfigures

with glory and delight that nature which it seemed to have left entirely to the cruel power of the Jews; and notice how the risen Savior, forgetful of Himself, befriends his abandoned and dejected disciples to encourage, to instruct and console them. We shall divide this first meditation into three parts, considering 1. the *resurrection* itself; then asking, 2. *to whom* did our Lord appear? and 3. *for what purpose* did he appear?

I. The Resurrection of Our Lord

1. What a rapture for the soul of our Lord when He could say: "It is consummated." (John 19, 30) All the frightful sufferings are over. The work that was assigned to me at my Incarnation is completed. The wrath of God is appeased; My heavenly Father is pacified and mercifully disposed towards the fallen race. The gates of heaven are again opened and mankind is saved.

2. In this joyful frame of mind our Divine Savior hastens to bring *gladsome tidings* and *deliverance* to the just souls of the Old Law, resting in Abraham's bosom. How they yearned with a holy impatience for the coming of their rescuer! They had heard from St. Joseph about His holy life at Nazareth and from John the Baptist about His miracles and sermons; now He stands before them in His glory. What exultation, what joy, what gratitude they must have lavished upon Him: the prophets, the patriarchs, Adam and Eve!

3. Meanwhile the hour appointed for the resurrection had come. The soul of Jesus, accompanied by the souls of the Old Law, betakes itself to the grave. How astonished these holy souls were when they saw the remains so horribly disfigured by pain and agony, the evidences of a most cruel death. The soul of Christ united itself with the body, and in an instant the wounds and scars disappeared, a supernatural beauty transfigured the body, now no longer mortal and passible. A brilliant host of angels descends from heaven to do homage to Him who is the head of creation: "When he bringeth in the first begotten into the world, he saith: And let all the angels of God adore him." (Heb. 1, 6)

4. Christ's glorious resurrection according to the flesh is to serve us as a model for our spiritual resurrection, which shall be the effect of the spiritual exercises. As our Lord rose never to die again, so must we renounce sin, that we shall nevermore sin grievously. As our Lord was resplendent in His heavenly brightness, so must we by our good example from now on, shine and edify. As He was spiritualized, so, too, must supernatural motives and heavenly sentiments transfigure our actions and omissions. "If you be risen with Christ," St. Paul writes to the Colossians (3, 1 & 2), "seek the things that are above; where Christ is sitting at the right hand of God: Mind the things that are above, not the things that are upon earth." As Christ after His resurrection was free from earthly difficulties

and could go with lightning-speed wherever He wished, so must we, in our spiritual life, be active, quick, cheerful and ready, paying no heed to difficulties and conscientiously living up to the duties of our calling. Let the risen Savior be our model in our spiritual renovation.

II. The Apparitions of Our Lord

To whom did our Savior appear after the resurrection?

1. It is piously believed that He first appeared to His Mother. More than all others, she had suffered with Him, and it was, therefore, but proper that He should appear to her before all others and console her.

2. After this He first appears to repentant sinners (Magdalen and Peter), then to the innocent (John). Sinners stand more in need of consolation, encouragement, and consideration than innocent souls.

3. He appears to simple, unpretentious servants who fearlessly visit the graves; and to the disciples, who for fear had withdrawn.

4. He appears to the assembled Apostles, and later to Thomas, who had separated himself from the rest, to show how pleased He was with men who were united; for God's blessing is upon union. Those who favor separation and will have their own way, deprive themselves of many graces.

III. The Purpose of our Savior's Apparitions

For what purpose does our Divine Savior appear?

1. To console, to instruct, and to encourage. For the same purpose He also appears in our hearts at Holy Communion.

2. We must admire the *condescension* of our Redeemer. Unmindful of His glory, He thinks of His disciples and patiently bears with their weaknesses and want of faith. (Luke 24, 15 sqr.)

3. The fruits of the apparitions are *peace* and *joy*. These are also the special fruits of Holy Communion, if one goes from Communion to his work quietly, with holy joy, and does his duty faithfully for the love of Jesus.

4. Let us be glad of the *brotherly love* of the Apostles, who communicated to each other the joyful tidings of the resurrection of our Lord. (Luke 24, 33 sqr.)

5. But let us also study the shortness of the heavenly consolation. Scarcely had the Apostles recognized our Lord before He vanished from their sight. (Ibid. v. 31) So it is in the spiritual life. Consolation and interior joyfulness do not always prevail. As in the natural order there is a change of seasons, with fair weather breaking into storms and sunshine following rain, so also has the spirit its changing moods and trials. At times

one feels dry, abandoned, depressed, as in a storm; at other times the Lord visits one with His consolations, with supernatural light and courage. From this we shall gather a few important hints for the future. We must not be discouraged when such a change comes over our interior life. As the husbandman is not discouraged when it rains, but hopes for the coming sunshine; as he is quiet when the sun is high and the heat is scorching, because he knows that soon there will be a rainfall, or that a storm is brewing: so in consolation we must not count on its permanent endurance; in desolation, temptation and interior storms we must not fear that all is lost, or that the Lord has abandoned us, but hope for fair weather. In time of consolation we should prepare for a change of weather. Permanency belongs to eternity; mutability is the mark of time. When we are in a joyful mood because of the glorification of our dear Savior, and full of hope that some day we also may participate in His triumph, let us ask Him, through the intercession of His beloved Mother, to visit us in Holy Communion, as of old He visited His Apostles, and fill us with strength and peace and holy joy, that we may courageously persevere in His service until we become partakers of His glory.

XXIII. MEDITATION:
THE TWO DISCIPLES AT EMMAUS

Among the apparitions of our Lord after His resurrection, one is especially instructive. It is that which the two disciples enjoyed on their way to Emmaus, and of which St. Luke (24, 13–35) narrates the full particulars. It is difficult to divide it into points. We shall, therefore, rather follow the narrative step by step, and draw from it useful instruction.

1. We are edified at the fraternal spirit of the two disciples. They were mindful, no doubt, of the rule given them by their Lord and Master to go out in pairs (Luke 10, 1 sq.); and being bound together by love, they took this perhaps necessary outing.

2. They entertain each other *well,* for their conversations are edifying. And from their intercourse we shall gather a very useful rule for distinguishing a good conversation from unbecoming, useless, idle talk. Imagine our Lord appearing to us and putting the question: "What are these discourses which you hold one with another as you walk?" (Luke 24, 17) If we can give to our Lord the contents of our discourse without embarrassment or blushing, as the disciples did, our conversation was *good;* if we cannot tell our discourse

readily and without embarrassment, that is a sign that our conversation was *not* of *the right* kind.

3. Important lesson! The Lord is often *nearer* than we think. The disciples were under the delusion that the Lord was dead and buried and His cause lost; but behold! He is with them, joins them, instructs and encourages them. Their despondency and excessive sadness dimmed their vision; "their eyes were held that they should not know Him." This often happens to Christians. In their despondency and dejection they forget the many consoling promises of God. Faith no longer enlightens, hope becomes weak, and love dwindles away. No wonder that such despondent souls feel themselves abandoned in their trials, because they do not recognize the loving hand of God (Heb. 12, 6 sq.) and fail to find our dear Savior in the tabernacle. "Their eyes were held that they should not know him."

4. Rightly does our Divine Savior rebuke them with sharp words: "O foolish and slow of heart to believe." They could have read in the prophetic books of the Old Law about the sufferings of the Messias and His glorification; yea, from His own lips they could have heard the clearest prophecies of His death and resurrection, and the numberless miracles which He wrought must have confirmed His words. But in their despondency they forgot all this. His rebuke was therefore well deserved, and they took it in the proper spirit. They are not

as sensitive as we are; they did not feel hurt or offended; they did not "show the stranger the door"; but rather, as they noticed that He meant well, they gave Him their full confidence.

5. Let us wonder at the condescension of our Savior towards these disciples whose shortsightedness was not due to malice but rather to weakness, to sadness and despondency. He lovingly befriended them and patiently repeated what He had so often taught them before. Let us, too, be considerate with the weaknesses of our brethren.

6. What is the substance of that long instruction and correction which lasted almost two hours? "Ought not Christ to have suffered these things and so to enter into his glory?" This, then, is the summary of Christian doctrine. This truth must always be before our eyes, and the practical consequences of it is that for us, too, there is no other way to enter heaven than that of suffering and the cross. We should therefore prepare and become familiar with it.

7. Let us learn the usefulness of pious and spiritual conversations. The disciples listened attentively to the instructions of the unknown Stranger, and absorbed the meaning of Holy Writ which He explained to them. A wonderful light flashed over their minds, their sadness gradually disappeared, courage and confidence returned, and their hearts were filled with enthusiasm. They admitted this to one another: "Was not our heart burning within

us whilst he spoke in the way, and opened to us the scriptures?" (v. 32) Such should also be the effect of spiritual reading and sermons on us.

8. "When they draw nigh to the town (Emmaus), whither they were going, and he made as though he would go farther" (v 28), they prevailed upon our Lord not to leave them; and He added grace to grace which they would have thrown away if they had not by their prayers urged and implored Him to remain. Oh, the Sacred Heart is so pleased when we beg, urge and molest it! This molestation is, however, to be in holy moderation and childlike reverence. Notice the beautiful prayer which the disciples offered: "Stay with us, because it is towards evening, and the day is now far spent." (v. 29) Such a petition our Divine Savior can not resist; He yields and remains. And now, how courteously they receive and how hospitably they entertain Him — as well as their scanty circumstances permit!

9. As a reward our Lord makes Himself known to them in and through Holy Communion. Continual growth in the knowledge of our Divine Savior is a special fruit of Holy Communion. But this consolation was of short duration. Scarcely "were their eyes opened, and they knew Him, and He vanished out of their sight." Then the two favored disciples hastened back to Jerusalem to communicate the glad tidings to their brethren. They did not continue their journey, but "rising up the same

hour, they went back to Jerusalem. And they told the things that were done in the way, and how they knew him in the breaking of bread." Works of charity are an excellent thanksgiving for the grace of Holy Communion, for thus we can pay our debt of gratitude, since the Lord accepts all these acts of charity towards our brethren. Let "Stay with us" be the prayer with which we conclude this meditation, for the evening of the retreat is approaching and these days of grace and salvation are coming to a close.

SPIRITUAL READING: A PLAN OF LIFE

At the conclusion of these spiritual exercises it will be well to gather the principal resolutions and draw up a programme for the future. It will be a mirror in which we can, from time to time, look at ourselves and see whether our life conforms to our resolutions. If we be wanting in any respect, we must repent; if part of it have escaped our memory, we must recall it. Thus the spiritual exercises will become fruitful. Such a brief programme St. Thomas unfolds in a hymn in honor of the Blessed Sacrament:

Recedant vetera,
Nova sint omnia,
Corda, voces et opera.

Away with the old, the dull, the lukewarm manner of living, let all be new: the heart, the tongue, the deeds.

We shall now study this newness, to make it a little more definite.

I. The Newness of the Heart

We must begin with the renovation of the heart: "With all watchfulness keep thy heart, because life issueth out from it." (Prov. 4, 23) Everything depends on the heart. This newness shall be threefold:

1. The newness of *purity*. After we have cleansed the heart by a good confession, we must keep it clean; first, of course, from grievous sin; then, from deliberate and voluntary venial sins; and third from daily faults, weaknesses and imperfections, unbridled passions and inclinations. We must cultivate this purity by frequent confession, by a daily examination of conscience, by reflecting our souls in the Sacred Heart.

2. Newness of *intention*. The heart must be new by its right *direction* to God, by purifying our intentions and motives. "I do always the things that please him." (John 8, 29)

3. Newness of *fervor*. The heart must be new by its fervor. The heavier the train, the more power must the engine develop to put it into motion. In like manner more work and greater cares call for greater and more enthusiastic zeal. And how many motives have we not for being zealous in the service of God? The *greatness* of the Lord we serve, the *sublimity* of the calling to which we have dedicated

ourselves, the *duty* of repairing the losses caused by our past negligence: "I return fourfold." (Luke 19, 8) Add to these the *zeal* of our brethren and colleagues, with whom we must keep abreast, the *activity* of the enemies of God and His Church, who put us to shame, the *short time* that is meted out to us, the *greatness* of the *reward* that awaits us, etc. With a pure, generous, zealous and cheerful heart let us now serve the Lord our God: for "God loveth a cheerful giver." (II Cor. 9, 7)

II. The Newness of the Tongue

We must pay special attention to the use of our tongue. The tongue is indeed but "a little member" (James 3, 5), but what mischief does it not do when it is not prudently controlled! Just because we use it so often we offend by it so easily. St. James declares: "But the tongue no man can tame." (3, 8) "For in many things we all offend. If any man offend not in words, the same is a perfect man. (3, 2) Precisely for this reason we must, during the spiritual exercises, think of reforming the use of the tongue. The same Apostle says: "And if any man think himself to be religious, not bridling his tongue but deceiving his own heart, this man's religion is vain." (1, 26) We shall therefore put *five bridles* on our tongue, a *fivefold silence,* and by so doing avoid many faults.

1. The silence of *charity.* By the use of our tongue we so easily offend against the love of our

neighbor. We scarcely open our mouth without committing sins of the tongue. We criticize people, make their faults known, or attribute ignoble motives to them; we often begin well by praising a brother: soon, however, the praise turns to blame. Even pious souls easily forget themselves. We wish to amuse ourselves, spread news, make ourselves important and interesting, and before we are fully aware of it, we have sinned. Let us hold on to two golden rules which will be of great use to us. First rule: "Thou shalt love thy neighbor as thyself." (Matt. 19, 19) What I do not wish another to say about me, that I ought not to say about him. Second rule: What I would not say in his presence because it might offend, mortify, or humiliate him, that I ought not to say in his absence.

2. The silence of *patience*. We but too often offend with our tongue by complaining in sickness, suffering, and unpleasantness that come upon us, and thus offend God, our superiors, and our brethren. We offend God by want of resignation; our superiors, because we too readily blame them as hard and unjust; our brethren, by blaming them for lack of consideration. We offend by exaggeration, spiteful expressions, rash judgments, and frequently condemning the most innocent doings of others; urging our friends to make similar complaints, and thus cause dissension and discord. In order to learn this silence of patience, let us often think of our Divine Savior, who was accused, calumniated,

mocked, and ridiculed before the tribunals, but even in the most agonizing pain did not open His mouth to complain.

3. The silence of *humility*. This we practice when we keep silent about our real or supposed advantages, when we do not willingly speak about ourselves, and do not, except for grave reasons, talk about our good works, mindful of the words of our Lord: "When thou dost an almsdeed, sound not a trumpet before thee, as hypocrites do in the synagogues and in the streets, that they may be honored by men. Amen I say to you, they have received their reward." (Matt. 6, 2)

4. The silence of *purity*. Our speech must be free from all uncleanness. For if ordinary gentle folk endeavor to be decorous in diction and flee from whatever is vulgar in conversation, then the more so should we who are children of God and brothers of Jesus Christ. We should be strict with ourselves in this, and let no word ever cross our lips that is unbecoming a child of God. We must not defile our tongue with vulgarity, for our Savior has sanctified that tongue in Holy Communion. Let us be ever mindful of the question which our Lord asked the disciples going to Emmaus: "What are these discourses which you hold with one another as you walk?" (Luke 24, 17) By salacious talk priests especially give great scandal.

5. The silence of *prudence*. If we wish to escape vexation, we must be prudent in our speech. How

often is not something said without consideration, then told to others; and then depression, misunderstanding, discord, and enmity spring up. It often takes weeks and months before the tension is broken and friendly relations are again restored. We should be careful when giving our opinion about others, and not be too trustful, for even "walls have ears," as the significant proverb says. What we believe has been said in private will soon be heralded from the housetops. Therefore we should always speak so that we need not be afraid of publicity. Be not hasty in speaking, but deliberate and careful, if you wish to live in peace.

Let us diligently observe this fivefold silence. We shall never regret having been silent; but we are often sorry for having spoken carelessly.

III. Newness of Action

All our actions should become new.

1. They should all proceed from faith; and as its fruit, they should be ennobled by the motives of faith. Only what proceeds from faith is pleasing to God: "Without faith it is impossible to please God." (Heb. 11, 6)

2. We must strive to make our actions faultless, and our works perfect: "In all thy works keep the preëminence." (Eccl. 33, 23) We do not offer decayed fruit to an honored guest; much less should we offer as an homage to the Most High works that are defective. Rather should we endeavor to

deserve the praise which the good people gave to our Lord: "He hath done all things well." (Mark. 7, 27)

3. We must be generous towards God. We must not be satisfied with doing that to which we are bound under pain of mortal, or at least venial sin. We must do more than strict duty calls for out of pure love. A heartfelt love among men often performs great deeds; surely then our love of God should not be niggardly and narrow-minded. Self-interest ought to urge us to be generous towards God, for God will not be outdone in generosity; that would be unworthy of His infinite goodness.

Therefore *"Recedant vetera,"* let everything be made new: our heart, our tongue, and our works. May the Sacred Heart, which has inspired us with these good resolutions, bless us so that we may carry them out to His own great joy.

VIII. CONSIDERATION: TRUE PEACE

Our Divine Savior, in His apparitions to His disciples, wished them peace. "Peace be with you," He greeted them. Peace should also be the fruit of these spiritual exercises. True peace eases and sweetens everything, brightens the whole exterior of man, edifies and attracts. For this true interior peace, according to St. Augustine, *four* things are necessary: *serenity* of mind, *tranquility* of soul,

simplicity of heart, and a *bond* of *peace* based on brotherly love.

I. Serenity of Mind

A serene sky is brought about by a fair-weather wind; when that wind blows, the storm clouds vanish and a blue sky prevails. This fair-weather wind brings three thoughts to the mind of a Christian:

a. Faith in the paternal providence of God, who is our Father, loves us, takes care of us, and without whose permission nothing can happen to us. Hence St. Peter tells us: "Casting all your cares upon him, for he hath care of us." (I Peter 5, 7)

b. The consoling doctrine of St. Paul: "We know that to them that love God, all things work together unto good." (Rom. 8, 28)

c. The conviction that in every state of life, in every office and condition, I can serve God and become perfect and holy.

These three thoughts are calculated to banish sadness and put us into a cheerful mood.

To cloud this serenity of mind the devil makes use of the imagination, by which he tries to raise clouds. We must be on our guard against this danger, learn to know our imagination, to prevent storms. The imagination is like a mirror. There are three kinds of mirrors: the concave, the convex, and the plain mirror. Each has its own peculiarities. The concave mirror enlarges and distorts the objects which it reflects. So, too, does the imag-

ination. Here for instance is a superior who does not look as kindly at us as he was wont to, or gives us a short and perhaps a chafing answer. At once our imagination begins to work. We think, study, and consider what the cause might be; we begin to suspect and lose our confidence and peace. The same thing happens in our relations with our brethren. Some one makes an inconsiderate remark. We take a bad meaning out of it, suspect an unfair and an unjust rebuke, and then feel hurt and offended. Our imagination urges us on. We get into an ugly mood, and then confusion disturbs the formerly happy relations with our brethren.

At another time the imagination is like a convex mirror, which diminishes and embellishes its objects. We commit, perhaps, some faults which are not at all trifling and rightly call for criticism and correction. The imagination enlarges the faults of others, but palliates our own, excuses them, places them in a favorable light, and sometimes even makes virtues out of offences. The consequence is that we are not willing to be criticized; we feel hurt, unjustly treated, and accuse our superiors and brethren of being severe, hard, and uncharitable. Dark clouds arise and darken the soul. In other cases the imagination minimizes and embellishes even greater faults. Under the pretext of being cheerful and witty, we offend against fraternal charity; and not to appear scrupulous, we consider ourselves not bound by many regulations; to cheer up

the brethren we act against our own conscience.

Again the imagination is like a plane mirror, which does not enlarge or distort, nor diminish and embellish things, but shows them as they are, but not where they are. It shows the objects that are behind us as if they were before us. Hence by following our imagination we are easily led on the wrong track. How often do we not blame others as the cause of a rebuke, an inattention, or a cross! In the light of faith we would recognize in all this the will or permission of God; and instead of ill-will and bitterness, peace would enter our heart. If, therefore, we wish to retain the cheerfulness of spirit, we must not give our imagination too much play, but rather let the Spirit of God waft over our interior.

II. Tranquility of Soul

This is the *second* condition of true peace. Our soul's tranquility may be disturbed by three different looks. A look into the past disturbs many, a look at the present disquiets others, and a look into the future fills others with care and anxiety.

1. Many are disturbed with anxiety about the past. Did I confess all my sins properly? Are there not some hidden sins still on my conscience? Had I true contrition? Has the Lord forgiven me? The following remarks will be helpful for such persons.

a. Can I say to myself, " I had a good will during

these spiritual exercises?" If so, I can be at ease. God looks to the good will. Here the words, "Peace to men of good will," are forceful. And the spiritual exercises which I made are themselves a proof that my will was good, for I was in earnest.

b. As long as my conscience does not tell me clearly and distinctly wherein my confession was defective, I can be at ease about it. Uneasiness without a good reason comes from the evil one, who loves to fish in turbid waters. As long as I can say to myself, "I was *honest* in my confession," I can rest easy!

The happiness and grace of having made the spiritual exercises should be a proof to me that God means well with me and ardently wishes my salvation, or He would not have given me so great a grace, which is given to but few. Hence the Lord will dismiss us from this spiritual gathering with the words which He spoke to those He had healed: "Go in peace." (Luke 8, 48, etc.)

2. Present events at times cause the soul to be ill at ease, *e. g.:*

a. Predominant *passions* and unregulated inclinations, which but too readily cause a storm to rise in the soul. Hence self-control must be acquired by a vigilant examination of conscience.

b. A want of *indifference.* When this is wanting, there will be excitement and disturbances as soon as we meet with something opposed to our inclinations. Hence cultivate mortification.

c. A *stormy* and hasty manner of acting, in which interior peace can scarcely be maintained, because there is a very close connection between the inner and the outer man. Hence the warning of our Lord: "Martha, Martha, thou art careful, and art troubled about many things: But one thing is necessary."

d. Too much *anxiety* about the future. Here we must recall the wise adage of the ancients: *Age, quod agis;* be mindful of our present charge, and do not worry about things that are not urgent.

e. *Meddling* in other people's business that does not concern us at all. Here we must call to mind the words of our Savior, when He said to Peter who was too much worried about John, and asked our Lord: "Lord, and what shall this man do?" "What is that to thee," answered our Lord, "follow thou me." (John 21, 21s.)

3. We sometimes permit ourselves to be disturbed by too much *anxiety* about the future.

a. Let us keep our peace by a childlike confidence in the providence of God, as we said in the beginning.

b. Let us remember that "time heals all things." We often picture to ourselves future difficulties and become sad and discouraged. And behold! when the time comes, the difficulties have vanished. We have a beautiful example in the history of our Lord's resurrection. Pious women went to the grave to embalm the sacred body, but a great diffi-

culty arose and worried them: "Who shall roll us back the stone from the door of the sepulchre?" And when they arrived, "they saw the stone rolled back." (Mark 16, 3, s.) An uncommonly prudent superior used to give to his young subjects, who often came to him in much excitement, this tried advice: "My dear, let us sleep over it." And how often have we not found after a night's rest that we were excited about nothing. The dreaded difficulties never turned up.

c. If there is a question of something that may concern us in the distant future, we should quiet ourselves with the thought: "God will provide!"

d. We must be on guard when the imagination pictures *improbable* events and thus disturbs us with useless anxiety. If God permits something extraordinary to happen, He will also give the necessary graces in due time. For fictitious cases, He need not give grace. No wonder that we do not know how we should act in such cases. Let us be calm and satisfied in submitting to the Sacred Heart.

III. Simplicity of Heart

This is the third condition of true peace. It stands in direct opposition to duplicity, dissimulation, and hypocrisy; and it is absent when we mean one thing and say another, when we wish to appear different from what we are, when we waver between two opposites, and in our convictions veer with every change of current opinion. Whoever has

such a contradiction between the dictates of his conscience and his external conduct can not enjoy true peace; because true peace consists in perfect harmony. Simplicity of heart therefore seeks only to please God, and has no other motives. It is not guided by the principles of this world, or by the wisdom of the flesh, does not lend a willing ear to sensuality, but strives to bring all into unison with the enlightened principles of our Divine Savior. In this, also, He gives us a beautiful example by His mode of life, which is so pure, so noble, so enlightened, so simple, so captivating, and so capable of winning the hearts of men.

IV. The Bond of Peace

Finally, for true peace, the bond of peace is necessary: cordial *agreement* with one's brethren and neighbors. Here we shall not enter into the particulars of fraternal charity; the theme is too vast to be treated in a few words. But we shall select a few thoughts simply to show how fruitful the subject is.

1. Our Divine Savior left this commandment peremptorily as His last will and testament. He repeatedly inculcated it at the Last Supper, called it *His* commandment (John 15, 12), a new commandment (13, 34), not as though it had not existed before, but because He proclaims it anew, places it in a new light, adduces for it new and powerful motives, and finally demands for it a development and

a perfection such as the world had never seen before.

2. He explains mutual love as a *mark* of his discipleship. "By this shall all men know that you are my disciples, if you have love one for another." (John 13, 35) Therefore, since it must concern us very much to be known as true disciples of our Lord, we should earnestly ask ourselves if we have this mark on us, and appreciate it highly.

3. In order to urge us on to the perfection of brotherly love, our Lord accepts for Himself our gratitude and love for our brethren. For what we do for the least of our brethren He considers as done for Himself. How consoling is not this thought! We often feel ourselves urged to love, thank, and serve our Divine Savior, and now we have an easy means to satisfy this demand in brotherly love and kindly offices to our neighbors.

4. This love *strengthens* our prayers, "For where there are two or three gathered together in my name, there I am in the midst of them." (Matt. 18, 20) And to pass over other reasons, what joy is there when concord and brotherly love prevail. Hence the Psalmist says: "Behold how good and pleasant it is for brethren to dwell together in unity." (Ps. 132, 1) Let us therefore esteem and preserve this bond of brotherly unity.

We should strive after heavenly peace. It will sweeten and ennoble this life and give us a foretaste of that eternal peace which will unite us for all eternity in heaven. Amen.

XXIV. MEDITATION: HEAVEN

The hope of a reward is a powerful motive. What do not worldlings do, what huge sacrifices do they not make, what sufferings do they not submit to, for an earthly and passing reward? The greater the reward is, the more certain they are of a rich gain, the more active and daring they become, the more willing they are to make sacrifices, even putting their lives in jeopardy. To convince ourselves of this we need but cast a passing glance at factories and mines, and at the gold and diamond-fields of America and Africa. Since, then, the hope of reward thus animates and rouses us poor creatures, it will be useful to take an inquisitive look at the eternal reward in heaven, to rouse and encourage ourselves to become fervent in the service of God and determined to make the sacrifices which that service demands. For this purpose we need but notice three little words, which are calculated to expand our hearts and fill them with courage. The three words are: heaven is *beautiful,* heaven is *mine,* heaven is *near.*

I. Heaven is Beautiful

Who shall paint the beauty of heaven for us? We read in St. Paul that " eye hath not seen, nor ear heard, neither hath it entered into the heart of man

what things God hath prepared for them that love Him." (I Cor. 2, 9).

1. Precisely because heaven *surpasses* all that we can imagine or surmise, we must conclude that it is infinitely beautiful. Picture to yourself a happiness ever so great, exert all the powers of your imagination and represent to yourself pomp and magnificence. Heaven is far more beautiful. For all that you devise is the product of your limited understanding and imagination, but eye hath not seen, ear hath not heard nor has it entered into the heart of man what God has prepared for them that love Him. How beautiful then must not heaven be, which surpasses all our comprehension!

2. Let us make use of a comparison which may help us to press onward in this meditation. How beautiful is the earth! Think of the sublime sight from a mountain-top, of a grand sunrise or sunset, of a glacier, of a fascinating Alpine scene. So beautiful is this earth that tourists hasten in crowds to enjoy magnificent views and cannot be satiated with the magnificence and grandeur of nature. If this earth is so beautiful, how beautiful must heaven be! Why? Because:

a. The earth is but a place of *banishment,* a valley of tears, a place of pilgrimage, where we have no lasting home. How beautiful, then, must heaven be, which is our true country, our fatherland, where we are to live for all eternity!

b. If this earth is so beautiful, which is but a

place of *labor* and strife, of struggle and mortification and sacrifice, where we must merit and earn our reward with strenuous exertion and resignation, how beautiful must heaven be, the place of rest, victory, and reward!

c. If the earth, in which the *enemies* of God dwell, is so beautiful, how beautiful must heaven be, where God abides with only His faithful servants, his intimates, friends and children!

d. If this world is so beautiful, where God reveals Himself *but obscurely*, as in a shadow or riddle, how beautiful must heaven be, where God reveals His entire majesty to His children and sets no limits to the revelation of His glory!

3. Let us regard the beauty of heaven from still another point of view. If this earth is so beautiful that men are unwilling to leave it, and death seems terrible to them, although the earth contains much bitterness (accidents, diseases, sufferings, separations, etc.), how beautiful must Heaven be, from which all sufferings, sickness and misfortune are excluded and where the words of the Apocalypse are verified (21, 4): "God shall wipe away all tears from their eyes: and death shall be no more, nor mourning, nor crying, nor sorrow shall be any more, for the former things are passed away"! Here all that is unpleasant and bitter is excluded and there is nothing but happiness, joy and bliss.

4. In Heaven we shall possess all that the human heart yearns for. For what does the human heart

yearn? For honors, riches, power. In Heaven we shall enjoy all these to satiety. Honors — for God will honor His faithful servants. "Whosoever shall glorify me," saith the Lord, "him will I glorify." (I Kings 2, 30) Can we imagine a greater honor than to be glorified by the Lord? And if God honors us, so will the whole court of heaven. Do you long for riches? We shall be heirs of God and joint heirs of Jesus Christ. (Rom. 8, 17) How rich is our Father, and what a rich inheritance awaits us? Do you long for power? We shall be partakers in the power of Jesus Christ, to whom all power is given in heaven and on earth. All His joint heirs become partakers of His power. "Father, I will that where I am they also whom thou hast given me, may be with me; that they may see my glory." (John 17, 24)

5. What pleasant company shall we enjoy in heaven! While here on earth where we are afflicted in body and soul with all kinds of miseries, the fleeting hours furnish rich enjoyments when spent in the pleasant company of a dear friend. How delightful, then, must converse be with the saints, who are free from imperfection, transfigured in body and soul, and in fact ideals of beauty and loveliness!

6. Thus far we have meditated on what is secondary and non-essential to heavenly bliss. The principal and essential part is the possession and enjoyment of God. To dive into this depth of heavenly

joy we must have a clear knowledge of what God is. We shall therefore press on, not to fathom the joys of heaven, but to foreshadow them. Let us consider:

a. That the possession and the enjoyment of an object gives us delight greater in proportion as the object we enjoy is greater, purer and richer in its contents. But God is not a finite good; He is the plenitude of all goodness, beauty and perfection. If even a drop, a shadow, of goodness, as it is found in creatures, makes us happy and delights us beyond measure, shall we not be entirely inebriated with delight when we behold God in His glory? "They shall be inebriated with the plenty of thy house; and thou shalt make them drink the torrent of thy pleasure. For with thee is the fountain of life; and in thy light we shall see light." (Ps. 35, 9, 10)

b. If the knowledge of single truths makes one feel so happy that learned men give up all earthly pleasures and spend day and night in searching for them, what delightful satisfaction must not the sight of Truth itself give, in which the elect possess all scientific knowledge in the most brilliant light!

c. So great is the bliss which consists in the possession and fruition of God that the Infinite One Himself is infinitely happy for all eternity in His self-enjoyment. If, then, it gives delight to Him who is infinite, how surpassingly glorious must it be for us. And this bliss will be ours, for the Lord said to his faithful servant: "Well done, good

and faithful servant, enter thou into the joy of thy Lord" (Matt. 25, 23), for this is His promised reward, and it is owing to Him, belongs to Him. Indeed, Heaven must be beautiful.

7. And all this lasts for *all eternity*. Eternity seals the joys of heaven. Were the fear to arise in the blessed that their happiness would come to an end, they would become unhappy. Because the greater the joy, the more terrible is the thought of its ending: for the end would spell misfortune and sadness. But the blessed have an unshaken confidence in the eternity of their happiness.

II. Heaven is Mine

Many a despondent soul will sigh and say: I knew all along that heaven is beautiful: but of what use is that to me if I must ever be afraid that I shall not get to heaven? Heaven is for the just, and I am but a poor sinner. To encourage such disheartened souls, we shall speak to them a few consoling words. We can of a truth say with the greatest confidence: Heaven is mine! Is that not a rash assertion? By no means! For:

1. Our Divine Savior has bought heaven for us with his Precious Blood. There was no need of His buying it for Himself, for it belonged to Him already. And He has ceded all His rights and claims to us, his lesser brethren. I can therefore say: "Heaven belongs to me, because Jesus Christ bought it for me with His merits, by His suffering

and death." When St. Bernard on his death-bed was looking forward to heaven with pleasure, the devil approached him and said: "How can you expect to go to heaven because of your wretched deeds?" The Saint answered: "I knew long ago that I must not rely on my own works; but my dear Savior has bought heaven by His passion and blood, and He cedes His merits to me, and with these I hope to get into heaven." Then, covered with shame, the evil spirit withdrew.

2. Heaven is *mine*. For were God not in earnest to save me, so to speak determined to have me in heaven, He would not have done and suffered so much for me or put so many means at my disposal. When we see a physician visiting his patient, taking all conceivable care, and prescribing the most effective remedies, we say: "That physician is in earnest and determined to save his patient." In like manner, from the many graces our Lord has given us, and from the exercises which we have just made, we can lawfully conclude that the Lord is in earnest for our salvation and surely wants us to be saved. Hence when despondency creeps upon you, go to the cross, consider the sufferings of your Saviour, and then ask yourself: "Would the Savior have suffered so much if He had not been in earnest about my salvation?" Heaven is mine; the proof is the cross and the Passion of our Lord.

3. If you have taken the vow of *poverty*, say anew: "Heaven is mine." "Blessed are the poor

in spirit: for theirs is the kingdom of heaven." (Matt. 5, 3) You have, so to speak, laid down the purchase-money, and the ware is already yours. The Lord does not say: Blessed are the poor in spirit, for they shall obtain heaven; no, heaven is already theirs. In all our sufferings and crosses, therefore, let us console ourselves with the words: "The beautiful heaven is mine."

4. There is an additional hope of heaven for the zealous missionary who makes precious and painful sacrifices to bring with unspeakable toil the lost sheep back to their Redeemer and their Good Shepherd; for the faithful pastor who for years has discharged his duties faithfully and been wide awake at the post assigned for him; for the nursing sister who with loving care and attention administers to the Savior in the hospitals, in the persons of lepers and of many unfortunately infected with repulsive and contagious diseases; for the teaching sisters, who spend their lives in the difficult work of training and saving for God those countless little ones whom Jesus loved so tenderly; for many a severely tried widow, and for servants and laborers who in the consciousness of having done their duty, can say with St. Paul, in the evening of their life: "I have fought the good fight, I have finished my course, I have kept the faith. As to the rest there is laid up for me a crown of justice which the Lord, the just judge, will render to me in that day." (II Tim. 4, 7, 8) According to the same Apostle, all

"that love his coming," all who, supported by the grace of God, do their duty faithfully, can look forward to this reward with confidence.

III. Heaven is Near

I shall soon die. But a few years and I shall stand before the gates of heaven; and were I to live a hundred years, they would soon pass. What a powerful effect has not this thought had on many. Heaven is near. This thought induced many young men and girls to renounce the short-lived pleasures and the fleeting possessions of this world, to make the way to heaven more safe. This thought animated the saints with a burning zeal to make good use of their time here to gather treasures for the hereafter. It waked the spirit of penance in the hermits that by good works they might secure election. In days long gone by a worldling asked such a penitent how he could be so cheerful while leading such an austere life. The hermit said: "I only look into that corner, and the severest penance becomes easy." "But what," said the stranger, "do you see in that corner, that makes everything so easy?" "In that corner is an opening," the penitent replied, "and through this opening I see heaven, and then I reflect: But a few years more and I shall be in heaven, where all suffering ceases and eternal joy awaits me." If, then, heaven is beautiful, is mine, and is near, must not the look at it together with this joyful hope enkindle my zeal?

If even a temporal and earthly reward strengthens and steels men to work, to suffer privations, and to make such sacrifices as our good God does not require from us to gain heaven, how I am put to shame by the eagerness of workingmen — and I have opportunities every day to observe them — if I am slothful in earning an eternal reward?

Put three questions to yourself:

1. What have I done for heaven? Little, perhaps nothing; whereas I was so active for passing rewards, earthly honors and distinctions.

2. What must I do for heaven? Everything; for it is worth everything, and will last for ever.

3. What shall I do in future? Everything; make use of every opportunity; nothing shall be hard for me. I shall follow the counsel of Christ: "— Lay up to yourselves treasures in heaven." (Matt. 6, 20) "Therefore, whilst we have time, let us work good." (Gal. 6, 10)

Let us make good use especially of three ever flowing fountains of merit:

a. Obedience, which we can practice even if we are not members of a religious order, by complying with the duties of our calling, and which is for us the will of God. Obedience makes everything meritorious.

b. Charitable offices, by which we serve the Lord Himself, who gives a rich, divine, and everlasting reward for the least service rendered Him.

c. Passive penance, as we called it before, *i.e.*,

patience and resignation under all the little crosses in which human life abounds: for the cross is the surest way to heaven. "We are heirs indeed of God and joint heirs of Jesus Christ; yet so if we suffer with Him, that we may also be glorified with him." (Rom. 8, 17) Therefore, "Mind the things that are above, not the things that are here upon the earth." (Gal. 3, 2)

Let us, therefore, after these Exercises again go back to labor and suffer. The labor is short, the reward will last forever. We shall never regret having done much, suffered much, and made many sacrifices for God and for heaven, but we shall find it painful on our deathbed if we have not made good use of the time, the opportunities and graces given us.

XXV. MEDITATION: THE LOVE OF GOD

St. Ignatius befittingly concludes the Spiritual Exercises with a meditation that is calculated to awaken in us the love of God. And, in truth, perfection consists in love, to which the Exercises must direct and bring us. It is the most sublime service of God; and by love God becomes in a special manner our Lord. Love is the sum-total of all virtues; it ennobles all works, makes everything pleasant, easy and sweet. What love can do in the spiritual life we see, as in a picture, in the love of a friend

for a friend, of a mother for her child, of a bride for her spouse.

St. Ignatius rightly premises that true love does not consist so much in words and feeling as in deeds. St. John admonishes us: "My little children, let us not love in word, nor in tongue, but in deed and in truth." (I Eph. 3, 18) This action manifests itself by communication of goods. Therefore he who loves likes to give presents as proof of his love.

After we have asked the Lord for the light to obtain a thorough knowledge of His love for us, and of His own loveliness, and for the grace to enkindle in us the fire of His love, let us examine the motives which will attune our hearts to the love of God.

First Motive

God is our greatest *benefactor.* Love shows itself by benefactions. God simply overwhelmed us with benefits. Think but of the gifts of *nature:* body and soul, health and the use of the senses, food and clothing, beloved parents and benefactors, general and special benefits. All this we owe to God, and these benefits He has conferred on us daily and hourly for many years. We are but a composition of benefits. "What hast thou that thou hast not received?" (I Cor. 4, 7)

We come now to the still more precious gifts of the supernatural order, the order of *graces:* our redemption by the sufferings and death of the Son of

God, our creation into this world *after* the coming of our Lord. Recall all the gifts of faith, of the true Church, of the sacraments; that the Lord, by sanctifying grace, has made us His adopted children, that He is so near to us by His Sacred Body in Holy Communion, the repeated remission of our sins, the many means of graces which accompanied us from the day of our birth to this day; so that in gratitude we must acknowledge: "He hath not done in like manner to every nation, and his judgments he hath not made manifest to them." (Ps. 147, 20) To thousands and thousands he has not been as generous as He has been to us.

Let us cast a glance into the *hereafter*, on the blessings of *heaven*. What is the Lord in His goodness not willing to give? Himself in all His glory. "I am thy reward exceeding great." (Gen. 15, 5)

If giving presents is a proof of love, and the Lord has showered benefits down upon us poor human beings, how He must love us! "What shall I render to the Lord, for all the things that he hath rendered to me?" (Ps. 115, 12) If beggars for a few cents love their benefactors, how shall we requite God's infinite love for us? What love then do we owe to God? But love must show itself in deeds. What can we give to the Lord? All that we have belongs to Him. But the Lord is so good that He takes His own benefits as presents if we but offer them as a sacrifice. There-

fore we shall confirm our love for the Lord by an act of consecration. We must say with a grateful, willing and cheerful heart: "Take, O Lord, and receive my entire liberty, my memory, my understanding, and my whole will. All that I am and have Thou hast given me, and I give it back again to Thee, to be disposed of according to Thy good pleasure. Give me only Thy love and Thy grace; with these I am rich enough and ask no more."

Second Motive

God in His love for us wants to be near us always. Love shows itself in this that it is fond of being with the person it loves. Lovers like to see each other. How does God answer this demand? He is everywhere near us, distributing favors in the whole of nature. In this eagerness to be still nearer to us, the Son of God came down from heaven to visit us in our homes: "And the Word was made flesh and dwelt among us." (John 1, 14) To perpetuate this visit, He instituted the most holy Sacrament of the Altar, to be wherever even a few Christians assemble. There He is day and night in the midst of them; and He rather waits for us than that we should have to wait for His coming and visit. If we cannot come to Him, He has Himself brought to us, even if our dwelling be ever so poor, a mere hut, a stable, a prison. The Holy Ghost makes us His temple, in which He desires to dwell. "Know you not," writes St. Paul (I

Cor. 3, 16) "that you are the temple of God, and that the Spirit of God dwelleth in you?" Furthermore, our Divine Savior in His love for us wants us to be with Him for ever. "Father, I will that where I am, they also whom thou hast given me may be with me." (John 17, 14) To Him, therefore, the words apply: "My delights were to be with the children of men." (Prov. 8, 31)

Such love, such condescension, calls for a return, and since a lover is fond of being near the person he loves, we will show our love of God by being with Him in thought, as a child away from home often thinks of its dear parents, and by visits which we can easily make to the Blessed Sacrament. We should be glad to have converse with Him, all the more because it is an honor that God deigns to associate with us poor creatures, and because these visits are always so rich in graces.

Third Motive

Love is strengthened not only by presents and visits but especially by *deeds*, when it is active and generous in favor of the one beloved. Thus a mother's love for her child shows itself not so much when she gives it fine clothes as when she works and stints herself for it, spends many a sleepless night at its bedside to nurse it in its sickness, and denies herself in many ways that she may take care of her child; when from early morning to late at

night she suffers and makes sacrifices for its welfare. So too does God show His love for us by being active for, in and about us. He is everywhere active in nature for our benefit. He gives growth and ripening to plants for our sustenance. He lights the sun to give us light and heat. He preserves, governs and directs the universe, that it may be at our service. Yes, the Son of God went still further for our sake. He worked for us, bore painful sacrifices for us, even suffered to save us. St. Bernard writes: "My reparation after the fall was not as easy as my creation. He spoke and the universe was created. (Ps. 148, 5) But He who by a single word created me, has said much, done wonderful things, suffered severely, not only severely, but even what humiliated Him, to bring about my reparation. 'What shall I render to the Lord for all the things that he hath rendered to me?' (Ps. 115, 12) In creation He made a present of me to myself, in redemption He gave Himself up for me, and thereby gave me back to myself. Hence by creation and redemption I owe myself for myself. What then shall I give to God for Himself? Were I to make a sacrifice of myself a thousand times, what am I compared with God?" I must therefore show and confirm my love by working, making sacrifices, and suffering for God. "Therefore, whether you eat or drink, or whatsoever else you do, do all to the glory of God." (I Cor. 10, 31)

Fourth Motive

The *amiability* of God. That this glorious and exalted motive may enkindle in us a fervent love, let us consider how often a mere shadow of beauty, a drop of perfection found in creatures, draws our heart, charms and enraptures us. What love, then, will the infinite beauty of God, the fountain of all perfection, enkindle in us? If, therefore, creatures approach you with their beauty and loveableness to draw you to themselves, to fetter and imprison you, cry out to them: "I would be a fool were I to run after a drop and give myself to a shadow, when I can have the sum-total of all beauty and glory. No, I will give my heart to the Infinite Being, who alone can make me perfectly happy." Creatures with their beauty shall be to me as a guide directing me and telling me to "Love God!" To Him my whole heart shall belong. And therefore creatures are so beautiful that they may remind me "how much the Lord of them is more beautiful than they, for the first author of beauty made all those things." (Wis. 13, 3) Rightly does St. Augustine say: "Heaven and earth and all that is in the universe cry out to me from all directions that I, O God, must love Thee. And they do not cease to cry out to all, so that they have no excuse." And if I furthermore consider that this infinitely beautiful, exalted, and perfect Being is *mindful* of me, and *watches* over me, and *loves* me, although

He has no need of me whatever; that He *wants* my love and longs for it, and *rejoices* when I love Him — how we must consider ourselves pressed to comply with His wish, and dazzled with His beauty and loveableness, be entirely consumed in His love, love Him with our whole heart, and with our whole soul, and with our whole mind, and with our whole strength, as He commanded us to do. (Mark 12, 30)

Let us ask our Lord by His precious Blood for such a love; and let it be the most beautiful fruit of these spiritual exercises. Let us willingly repeat the beautiful petition of St. Augustine: "That I may know myself and know Thee, that I may love Thee and despise myself."

A. M. D. G.

THE END

060.32
H948

6464

Herter, Hugo
AUTHOR

Sketches for the Exercises of an
TITLE

Eight Days' Retreat.

DATE DUE	BORROWER'S NAME
	STORAGE - COSA

6464